

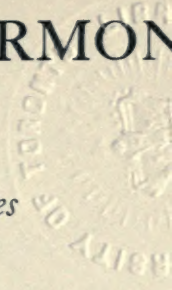


VILLAGE SERMONS



Relig.
Theol.

VILLAGE SERMON



Second Series

BY THE LATE
F. J. A. HORT
D.D., D.C.L., LL.D.

SOMETIME HULSEAN PROFESSOR
AND LADY MARGARET'S READER IN DIVINITY IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

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PREFATORY NOTE

A VOLUME of Dr. Hort's Village Sermons published in 1897 has found so many grateful readers I am encouraged to hope that a second series of similar discourses may be not unwelcome. Even in one instance, the twenty-four sermons contained in this volume are given as originally delivered, though most of them were afterwards adapted to the understanding of other congregations. They are arranged for convenience in the order of Church seasons for which they were composed, though they belong to various dates between the years 1857 and 1872.

ARTHUR FENTON HO



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I

REDEMPTION BY JUDGEMENT

“ZION shall be redeemed with judgement, and her converts with righteousness.”—*Isaiah* i. 27.

THE first lessons for to-day and for many Sundays to come are taken from the prophet Isaiah. There are good reasons for this. From to-day onwards till Septuagesima Sunday, when the preparation for Lent begins, we shall be taught to think upon the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh of man and His making Himself known to the whole world. It would be impossible to find reading better fitted for this time of blessed and cheering thoughts than the prophecies of Isaiah. I suppose no one could listen to them attentively, and give himself up to their spirit, without being, as it were, carried off his feet by their divine power and loftiness. They lift us up into a higher and better world, even when they make us feel in many ways that they were meant for just such as we are.

from them something worth knowing: even in this slight and uncertain way of using them, they were fitter to meet Advent, and Christmas, and Epiphany. But to those who *do* try to learn from Isaiah something more than an utterer of enlivening words, he speaks much more plainly and helpfully of the great truths of which Advent and Christmas and Epiphany are appointed to remind us. Isaiah has often been called the Evangelical, that is, the Christian prophet; not merely the prophet of good news in general, but the prophet of the good news to us in Christ our Saviour.

His lot was cast in a very sad and dark time of Jewish history. He saw his country sinking lower and lower in sin; as the lesson for this Sunday says, "a people laden with iniquity, a generation of evil-doers, children that were corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, that had provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, that were gone away back, that have said, We will not see, neither will we acknowledge: for we have despised His word, we have despised His voice, we have despised His word, we have despised His voice, we have despised His word, we have despised His voice." And as they went down in sin, so also dangers and troubles thickened around the land. A cruel enemy, the Assyrians, hovered around them, ready to waste their country and carrying them away as prisoners: these enemies obtained hold of the whole land except Jerusalem itself, and almost the whole of Jerusalem.

These miseries frightened many of the people of their neglect of God's service. They felt that God was angry with them, and they thought they might persuade Him not to be angry with them, and

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very zealous and careful in keeping Sabbaths holy feasts. But all this was of no avail to procure God's favour for them. Instead of being persuaded by them to soften His anger, He became more angry with them than before. They had been selfish and wicked all along, and they were selfish and wicked still ; only they glossed it over with a smooth covering of religion. Therefore their keeping of the v feasts which God Himself had appointed became in God's sight : they were, He said, a trouble unto Him : He was weary to bear them. He goes on to declare in unspeakably awful language that He cannot listen to the prayers of such men. He never yet refused to listen to the prayer of any sinner who sought to be delivered from his sin. But His ears are always deaf to those who come to Him only for what they can get out of Him. "When ye spread forth your hands,"—that is, hold up your hands in prayer, "I will hide mine eyes from you : yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear : Your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean ; remove away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes : cease to do evil ; learn to do well ; seek judgement to relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."

Such then were the times in which Isaiah lived. To men like these it was his work to preach about the glory of the Lord ; and a hopeless task it seemed. And so indeed it would have been, utterly and entirely hopeless, if he or they had stood alone,

Isaiah was driven to look more and more into the heart of man and all the sins of kings and people helped him to see more clearly a Holy Everlasting King in the true Lord and Saviour of His people, to expect a day when that true Lord and Saviour should be perfectly unveiled and shewn forth to His people. And when at length a better time came and King Hezekiah learned in his latter days to seek the Lord more sincerely, and to guide His people in the right way as a true king should, this only made the picture of the Heavenly King who should one day be known upon earth, still clearer and brighter to his eyes.

This then was the way in which Isaiah saw the Gospel prophet. By this kind of training he taught him to behold in spirit the Prince and Saviour who should one day be born King of the Jews. The Saviour must be at one with God, with that true God, whom he beheld coming out of His presence to judge his own nation and all other nations for their manifold sins. Thus the two thoughts of judgment and salvation became closely joined together, for salvation could come from the Lord, till by his coming He had purged away the dross from the heart of His people.

- These prophecies of Isaiah therefore are excellent lessons for us when we are passing through this season of Advent. Advent contains the promise of the approaching Christmas, in other words, the promise of the coming of the Prince of Peace. But

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in the balance and executing vengeance, swift or slow, upon those who are found wanting ; and who one day appear again to judge the whole world. One side of the picture looks joyful and pleasant, the other gloomy and sad. But they go together. Advent more than any other time sets them side by side for us to look at. We cannot be partakers of the blessed vision of peace which lies yonder in far distance, if we refuse to allow Christ the Judge first to probe us thoroughly, to look well if there be any way of wickedness in us, and so to lead us into the way everlasting.

And here Isaiah comes in well to help us. He shews us the kind of preparation which we need for meeting the coming of the Lord, because his prophecies themselves contain the preparation by which God sought to turn the hearts of the Jews in those days. As we read or listen to his burning words, we may take them as a message straight from God to ourselves. If so, they will assuredly give us many sharp thrusts. It is painful and sore to have the dark corners of our hearts thus dragged out into the light. But it must be so. If they are left to fester on in darkness, the powers of healing cannot touch them. We may well bear manfully even the most deeply cutting and piercing words, when we know they are spoken to bring us back to health and righteousness. Therefore Isaiah's words can never have told properly upon any who feel nothing more

This kind of probing we want at all times we are such slaves of use and custom that ought to be done always is apt to be never always. Happily God has provided a remedy for this state of things in such seasons as A. When a clear message like this comes to us twice a year, it is not only grievous sin to shew ears against the voice of God, but also mad to throw away the help thus given us towards a new life.

Now if we take Isaiah's account of his own vision and apply it to ourselves, it is no great wonder if we are unwilling to confess any likeness. It is true there may not be the same violence and flagrant crime which he saw in his day. Yet even in our comfort we cannot take to ourselves without remorse. If we look beyond our own immediate neighbourhood, we shall notice quite enough to startle us out of the comfortable fancy that this is not an unpopulous land of great crimes. They may not be as widely spread as they have sometimes been: but they are frigid, cold, deep and wicked. What year now passes without its tale of murders, cruelties, adulteries, frauds, plotted with a devilish coolness and will, which more than double their blackness? And if we are quite honest, we may see, if we choose to look at these monsters of wickedness are true brothers and sisters of our own, that we have lurking in the bosom of that devilry which is full-blown in the

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Nay, I need not speak only of hidden beginnings; is there not open sin enough actually among us? Are none of us cold and hard and proud to those who are poorer and lower than ourselves? Are none of us ready to oppress those who are in our power, treating them as mere tools bought with our money? Do none of us make it a practice to cheat any one whom we are able to cheat, and to take every kind of unjust advantage whenever we can? Are there no young men or young women here who give way to unlawful desires and pollute their bodies with filthy deeds? Have we no drunkards among us, no cruel or passionate husbands and wives, no careless parents, no rebellious children? Unless all our consciences can give an unflinching 'No' to these questions, is it possible for us to be unconcerned when Isaiah declares to us God's awful judgements on those who do such things?

Nay, I fear that further evil which grieved him so deeply is not wanting among us. It would be strange indeed to talk of an excess of religion here. But surely, surely, many of us must confess that we have often striven to hide from ourselves our own evil, or to purchase a place in God's favour by a flimsy hollow thing which we fancy is religion. But, however much we may deceive ourselves, God is not mocked. That which a man sows, that shall he also reap. God will have nothing to do with the talk and the prayers and the church

each other, or whether we keep ourselves un-
from sins against ourselves, so long as w
Him His prayers and His services. All the h
and the earth are His, and He cannot *want*
thing of ours except the obedience of our
hearts. This He does want, and this He wil
and even that not more for His sake than fo
For He knows that, while we follow our own c
we are but plunging ourselves deeper in
Often we will not believe that what w
plunging ourselves in *is* misery and destr
By fits and starts we do now and then
glimpse of the dark pit beneath us ; but not
or even generally. We *are* able for long
to make believe that all is right. But
steps in and tells us that all is not rig
speaks to us of a terrible day of the L
hosts, when every false veil shall be torn
and the hell which we have made for ou
shall be seen in all its nakedness.

But we need not wait till then. The
voice speaks to us of earlier days of the
by the blaze of which we may in good tim
things in their true light; if we will. Nay
the quietest times are full of His judg
But ours are not quiet times ; or, at le
they seem just now to be quiet, it is wi
sickly quietness which comes before a
Twenty six hundred years have not av

REDEMPTION BY JUDGEMENT

the earth or lost their power to slay. I do not say these things to frighten you. What ought really to frighten us is the sin which we cherish and indulge in our own selves. Where that sin is there we know there must be judgement; if not by the sword or famine or pestilence, then by some other way. This was the message which Isaiah had to bear to his people; and most surely it has not grown stale and out of date since then.

When we receive the message, we call it harsh and cruel: we complain that God will not let us alone: we ask what has become of His mercy, which He talked of love. No, brethren, it is not harsh and cruel: God will not let us alone, just because His name is Love. We by our perverseness have made it impossible to bring us back to our own heavenly home by any dealings less severe: therefore God will not shrink from us, but will punish them, for all our fretful cries. He knows well that we so easily forget, that there is no peace for us but in Him: and therefore he is bent on saving us to Himself, that we may be once more as blessed and perfect as He made us, before He allowed the devil to spoil us.

And so the darkest day of judgement has always a yet brighter day shining beyond. Through Advent we rise to Christmas. But Christmas will bring no blessing to those who have thought Advent to be only a curse. By judgement comes redemption.

last. Let us turn our hearts to Him, or rather to Him "Turn thou us, and we shall be turned" then He will Himself turn His hand upon us and purely purge away our dross. It is not the vernal one Advent, nor of many: it cannot cease so long as any sin keeps its hold upon us: but if we could look so hopefully on to the end, much comfort we, to whom is given the clear knowledge of the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world. The blood of our Judge has been shed for us: that heavenly comfort goes down deeper than any misery which can befall us, deeper even than all our sin.

II

HOPE FROM THINGS WRITTEN AFORETIME

“WHATSOEVER things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”—*Rom. xv. 4.*

THESE words, the first verse of the epistle for this day contain in brief the pith of the whole. Just before St. Paul has been quoting a verse from the Psalm. In the text he tells the Romans why he did so. They might ask why he repeated to them what was saying out of a book, instead of speaking in his own person what he thought best for them. He here tells them why. Every thing that had been written down in old times and kept safe in books up to the present time was intended for our learning: God meant that we should learn something from it which we could not learn so well in any other way. Then he goes on to tell them what he and they might gain about all things by this learning. It was hope: “that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” This is the chief thing which is

In the fourteenth chapter he had had to come to their wrong and unhealthy state, which they brought about by their quarrellings and backbitings, taking at the most trifling doings of their neighbours as themselves doing things which they knew would offend their neighbours, and that for the same reasons; Jewish Christians probably set against Gentile Christians, and Gentile Christians against Jewish Christians. In the epistle for to-day he comes to the words which I have already quoted, he goes on to the same subject, and entreats them to receive one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of the Father and God; and shews that the Jews and Gentiles are joined together in God's purposes of mercy and grace. And then he comes back to what he had said before about hope, no longer merely as set before them in the Scriptures, but as coming straight from God himself, the God of hope. "Now the God of hope," he says, "will fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that your hope may abound in *hope*, through the power of the Holy Ghost." Such also is the language of the apostle, though in a feebler and lower strain; "Blessed be the God who hath caused all Holy Scriptures to be given to us for our learning; grant that we may in such measure hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that, by patience and comfort of the Holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given to our Saviour Jesus Christ." The hope here se-

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This Collect and Epistle therefore, appointed for the Second Sunday in Advent, may help us to see that Christ and His Church wish us to live during Advent in hope and not in fear. In one or the other we must live, if Advent has any meaning at all to us. It is as I have said before, the season which tells us of a *coming* Lord ; and, whether it be on Christmas and the memory of His First Coming or on the unknown future and the fact of His Second Coming that we fix our eyes, in both cases it points forward that we are looking. But our expectation of what is yet to come may be either a help or hindrance to us in all that we are doing at the present moment, according as it is hopeful or fearful.

Now in saying that the Collect and Epistle for to-day give our Advent thoughts a right turn in teaching them to be hopeful, I do not mean to say that they may not rightly bring serious alarm to many of us. The vision of a judgement to come cannot cease to be very awful ; for it warns us that God's eye, which cannot be blinded, will search out our most secret wrong doings ; and God's hand, which cannot be shaken off, will sorely punish us for them all. But when we know well the true ground of hope, as they are set before us in the Bible, we shall learn to rejoice in His righteous judgement because by them God is evermore working a gracious and blessed work upon us and upon all mankind.

Thus the hope and the grounds of the hope are set before us at once. We are desired to take heed of God's judgement, and then we are told to take heed that our thought of God's judgement be full of hope, not hope of escaping the judgement, but hope of being helped and saved by the judgement; and at the same time we are bidden to make use of the hope and the patience and comfort which it contains, so that we would know what reason we have to be hopeful.

I have often told you that it is not for nothing that Advent and Christmas are so closely connected together; that, if we wish to know what manner of Christ will come in the clouds of heaven, we need only to read about the Christ who was born of a virgin manger at Bethlehem; for they are one and the same, in earth and in heaven, in lowliness and in glory,—even Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. St. Paul's words in the Epistle lead to nearly the same thing: only they say a great deal more. He wished the Romans to nourish hope, which he was striving to wake up in their hearts, on the record of men and things of olden times, on "Whatsoever things were written aforetime." When he speaks of the Scriptures, he clearly thinks of them here mainly in this light, as bearing witness to the doings and sufferings of men of the same flesh and blood as themselves. He wrote, our New Testament had not yet been put together, and a great part of it was not in ex-

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blessing, when all the world seemed turned up-
down with new and strange things, to be able to
to those old stories and prayers and praises and
preachings. He seemed to find himself and all
trials faithfully foreshadowed in the men of old ti-
and their trials. Man was still the same that
had always been, and God the same that He h-
always been. He felt and knew all those O-
Testament heroes, whose stories he had learned
a boy at Tarsus and Jerusalem, to be his own de-
brethren still, living evermore in the presence
their common Father. If he admired them when
was only a Jew, how much more did he love and
revere them now as a Christian! That blaze
light which smote him blind as he was on t-
way to Damascus, was but the sign and firstfruits
the light which had been entering his heart a-
mind now for many years past, sometimes in sudd-
bursts, sometimes slowly and gently. But all t-
new light which Christ had poured forth within h-
only helped him to see and know those men of t-
Old Testament better and better, and to read mo-
fully the riddle of their lives.

Can we understand anything of this, brethren,
what we have felt within ourselves? How ma-
are there here who can say that the Old Testame-
(or indeed any part of the Bible) has been to y-
anything like what it was to St. Paul! I am su-
there are many here to whom the Bible has prov-
itself

they have themselves found most worth praying. But let no one think that he knows half the worth of the Bible. I suspect that many of us who have really found out something of it think of it chiefly as either preaching to the people or praying with them. This is quite good and true. But my text gives a hint of another and perhaps still more helpful way of using the Bible, than the story book which God has given for the use of women, and children alike. We all get tired of hearing nothing but lessons about what we ought to think, say, and do; but it is otherwise when we read of what other men have thought, said, and done. Then our minds are quickened and roused to a degree of attention that was scarcely possible before. There is probably not one among us who would not enjoy and be moved by a story more than any other form of words.

Now this being the case, it is well worth while to observe how very large a part of the Bible is made up entirely of stories. According to the notion which we are apt to form to ourselves of the Bible, we might think it very odd that it is not one long sermon. But God, who meant it to have its real use in everything that we do, has happily made it otherwise. He, who knows best what is best for His own creature man, has caused His own book to be made of such materials as will best find their way to the inmost heart of man. He puts into

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wisest of them expounded His will to their countrymen. These books, He tells us, were the precious inheritance of Apostles and martyrs, able to make them wise unto salvation, and able to make us wise unto salvation also. But God's gift to us does not stop here: we have a treasure which St. Paul himself could but partly enjoy. The books of the New Testament complete the gift; and five of them too are stories. All the manifold lives of the men of the Old Testament meet together to one point in the life of the Son of Man. In His life we learn more perfectly all that we have ever learned about our fellowmen, what they and we are, and what they and we may be; and still more do we learn more perfectly all that we have ever learned about God Himself, His dealings with men, and His ways in the whole creation. And then the book of the Acts of the Apostles reminds us that the Christ is linked on to mankind forward as well as backwards. That story is the beginning of a new course of things to which we ourselves belong. The First Coming of Christ does not estrange us from any of the men of old time, but joins us to them more closely.

In this way we may gather hope from whatsoever things were written aforetime. The hope which God would have us cherish is not of some entirely new thing to which we are altogether strangers, and which will sweep away everything with which we have been becoming familiar.

like a shadowy dream of sleep and darkness, but a solid truth of life and light. But the heart of the Gospel is a hope of God in our Saviour Jesus Christ, not a hope of some new lord in an angelic helper. It rests upon God's eternal counsel. He has been working out ever since the beginning, and which we can spell out piece by piece in the records of His book. The coming of the Son of Man is none other than the Saviour; neither will the judgement be any new thing. He is judging the world and me and every one at every moment: separating the good from the bad in us, and burning the chaff with fire unquenchable. We shall be entirely filled with that divine hope, the more we strive to bring the thought of our Saviour before us. Judge to bear upon all our present doings. If sorrow or want or any other trial press down now, and seems to make hope almost an impossibility, let us remember what the text says to us, that it is in the *patience* and the *comfort* of the Scriptures that our hope is to be born and nurtured. St. Paul drew his lesson of meekness for himself and the Roman Christians from one of the Psalms, of all the Psalms, the 69th: "The reproaches which they that reproached thee are fallen upon thee." Even taken as the words of David, they lead us to him to see the communion of God and man, and the way of self-denial and abasement in which alone man can ascend to God. But since the perfect Son of Man had appeared on earth,

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power. And, now that Christ had ascended up high, His blessed life and death had already become part of the things written aforetime for our learning. Such an union of God and man, an union in suffering and reproach is all that we need, and nothing less would suffice. No hopes can be too high for men who have Christ for their elder brother; and none can be partakers of our hope who will not follow Christ, who pleased not Himself but spent and at last yielded up His life in doing the will of Him that sent Him.

III

THE LASTINGNESS OF GOD'S WORDS

"HEAVEN and earth shall pass away : but my words shall
away."—*Luke* xxi. 33.

HERE we have two sayings, set the one over the other. The things which can pass away compared with the things which cannot pass away. It is hardly possible to have serious thoughts of time, without being moved by something of the meaning of both sayings. In Advent however they come upon us with a force which may be wanting. This force they gather both from their own meaning and from the time when they were spoken. For they are part of what may be called our Lord's great Advent discourse, the discourse in which He declared the day of Judgement which was coming upon the Jewish nation for all their unrepented sins against God, ending with their rejection of Himself; and in which through that imminent coming He shadowed out a yet more distant

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be in the sky and in the earth and in the kingdom and powers of men upon the earth. "There shall be signs," He said, "in the sun, and in the moon and the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken." Such changes would be seen as the world had never known before. It would seem as though the very earth and sky would themselves pass away. The disciples might well suppose that nothing whatever would be able to keep its place; that the old state of things would be utterly destroyed, and that what should follow would have nothing to do with what went before. But not much would be changed, but not everything; there was that which would remain and not pass away. "My words," Christ said, "shall not pass away."

We are used to this saying of our Lord's, and so we forget how startling it really was. To all outward appearance nothing seemed so completely to pass away as Christ's words. For many months He, as an obscure peasant had been going about speaking many words. But the effect, the work done by His words, seemed to be nothing or next to nothing. Twelve Apostles followed Him, and over them His spoken words had at least had some power; but they too were often faithless and cold. And as for all the others who heard His words, they seemed to forg-

His teaching, though backed by His mighty power. Even the great multitudes, who came out and followed Him into the wilderness, He was obliged to tell them that they followed Him not for the sake of what He had to say to them but for the sake of the loaves of bread with which He fed them. Thus it seemed as if His words were all but spoken to the air, and blown away by the wind into nothingness as soon as they were spoken.

But it was not so. This He declared in the words which He said to them. All those things which seemed most solid and permanent would crack and melt and pass away ; while the quiet unheeded words of His would live on for ever to age and change the whole face of the world, and be always bringing forth fresh thoughts in the hearts to bear fruit in their lives. The power and lastingness of Christ's words would be seen in those very words which He was uttering at that moment. That generation of men among whom He was living, and to whom He had spoken so many words in vain, should not pass away, He said, till this prophecy should be fulfilled. With their own eyes many of them would see His words acted on in the world of the earth. But this was meant to be a promise and pledge of the everlasting power which lay in *all* Christ's words ;—nay even in the words over and over again when the storm of the world which they foretold had already passed. For it was impossible that one single striking fulfilment

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the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. This purpose of the Father could not fail. His word guided and moulded everything which Christ said or did. His work on earth was a saving work. His words, which were in fact a part of His work, could be nothing other than saving words. I do not say that they were all pleasant words. Some of them may indeed have had a very pleasant sound ; for there are times in our lives when we need the comfort of Divine words sounding gently and peacefully in our ears. But many of them are sharp enough too : if they were not, they could not be so entirely saving.

Now if we ask the secret of this lastingness of Christ's words, He gives us the answer Himself, when He tells us that the word which we hear from Him is not His, but the Father's which sent Him, and that He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God. They are no mere kindly expressions of a friendly and pitying beholder. They are the words of Him who made the world and all that it contains, and by whom it is guided and governed every hour. Whatever help they give us is not *help against* the order and arrangement of all things ; but help to enable us to *use* the order and arrangement of all things. There is no such comfort and strength as in this thought. The words of Christ come straight from the very fountain of life itself. By the means of them He who made and sustains all things enables us to see His plans and purposes in

that we fall so grievously short of His meaning them He shews us how we may even yet enter His gracious purposes, and become all which from the first made us to be. Above all, the fact that Christ's words are indeed God's own delivers us from that dreadful notion that He came to save us *from* God. When we thoroughly take in the fact that all the gracious words of the Gospel do at last come to us from Him at whose Name our guilty conscience shudders, we learn that Christ's work is to bring us near to God, not to put us out of His reach. And thus also it is that His Words cannot pass away. If they could pass away, then God's own nature, or at least His plans, would pass away too. But this we know cannot be. The words which He has spoken cannot come to nothing, though it may be necessary in the course of His Providence that great shocks and changes should fall upon the earth: but His everlasting counsels last on through all of them all, and therefore Christ's words, telling of His counsels, last on too.

Again, as I have often said, Advent is meant to be a time of hope. We want the invitation to hope both in our Advent thoughts and in all our thoughts. Few indeed are there of whom it can be said that they hope too much. With most of us the difficulty is to keep up any steady kind of hope at all. And then, at particular times in our life, we may go forward hopefully to this or that happiness which

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hopefulness. Usually either our thought of what is coming is gloomy enough ; or (more commonly) we give ourselves up in a kind of half sullen way to whatever the future may bring, looking for neither much to lift us up nor much to press us down.

Our natural thoughts about our Lord's coming are still darker. We shrink from going before His Judge, and long to escape from His judgement. But this is not altogether a right feeling. Since all our ways are in God's hand, it is not right to let ourselves sink into a state of mind such as we might reasonably expect to find among men who have no knowledge of a God ; who feel that they are surrounded by different powers, some of them good, but many certainly evil ; and who never can tell *which* are the strongest, the good or the evil, and *which* will at last gain complete mastery over them. We cannot indeed, nor ought if we could, throw off altogether the fear and awe which come over us when we think of God's judgements : not only upon the sins of the world, but upon our own sins. The first lessons for these Sundays press this warning home to us. It must be ill for us to turn aside those terrible words of woe which came from the lips of Isaiah. Such passages read in our ears year by year bear the plainest witness that the mouth of the Lord is full of terror and threatening, darkness and not light, to those who *will* not turn, but go on still in their wickedness and forgetfulness.

redemption is brought forth. There is no more curse upon us which is not the fruit of sin, by judgement sin is purged out.

While we go on in an even quiet sameness of living, good and evil, right and wrong, life and death become so mixed together that it is hard to disentangle them. But when the Lord speaks in the thunder and lightning of His wrath, then the confusion begins to pass away, and things put on one of their true shapes; He thus declares in language which even the hardest heart cannot misunderstand that the mark of His anger is ever against sin, and that He *will* have none of it in the world He has made. But that same voice is also at the same time the voice of loving-kindness, only more earnest in its tone. It bears witness that God is content to let us lie still: He must and will raise us up, whether we like it or not. His words, therefore, are the speech of His will and counsel, cannot be taken away. They stand fast in this late age of the world as true as when they lay hidden in the Father's bosom before the world came into being. In the days of Jesus our Saviour they were spoken out to our ears and hearts once for all and now we have them always with us.

We all, my brethren, have this week¹ heard His voice speaking to us in tones which have, I think, reached every heart among us. We have looked on the face of the greatest and wisest and best in the

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in all our worship in the house of God. And blow has fallen upon us while we are daily expecting to find ourselves once more in the midst of miseries and anxieties of war. Yet even these thoughts press less upon us than the bitter sorrow which has fallen upon our Queen, and for her sorrow upon every household in the land where her name is loved and honoured. This is an Advent word to us all: if we do not feel it to be such, it may be because we are too wrapped up in our selfish care for England or the Queen. Yet the joy and hope which Christmas brings should still keep their place in our hearts. God, our own God, will sustain us; we humbly trust and pray, bless our land and its King, whom in His goodness He has given to be its Head. The very loss itself may bind us all more closely together. For Christ's words of blessing never fail.

The love which was before all worlds shall, we know, outlast all worlds; and we can cling to it as solid ground to stand upon which nothing can shake, when everything seems against us and we feel as if in the long run we could do nothing to shake off the power of evil. But God's everlasting Word teaches us better things: "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." Taken only as words, they would fail us in our sorest need. Their true use is to tell us of a God of hope, who not only speaks

IV

THE MINISTRY OF PREPARATION FOR LORD'S COMING

“REMEMBER ye the law of Moses my servant, which I com-
unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judg-
Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the com-
the great and dreadful day of the Lord.”—*Malachi* iv. 4, 5.

THE Epistle for to-day begins with these v-
“Let a man so account of us, as of the min-
of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of
It is so easy to give this verse almost any me-
we like, that we must look back a little and
what led St. Paul to write it. He has been
proving the Corinthians for two particular fa-
the one, of setting up some favourite apostle
teachers against the favourite apostles or tea-
of others, one declaring that St. Paul himself
greater and wiser than all the other Apostles
second glorifying St. Peter, a third thinking
one equal to Apollos, and so on. Their s-

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supposing that the use of their teachers was please them and speak to them such things they liked to hear. We can now see what Paul meant by calling himself and his brother apostles ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Not what they were themselves, one or the other, but whose servants they were, was the matter to be thought of. He, Paul, asked them to listen to him, not because he was Paul, but because he was Christ's minister or servant, sent by Christ to speak the words of Christ. St. Peter and Apollos were Christ's servants as much as himself, and he wished those who admired him to treat them as such. Further, he says, they were stewards of the mysteries, or hidden truths, of God. That which they had of their own and which made them the favourites of foolish people, the wisdom of one, or the power of speech of another, or the zeal of another, this was not their true claim. They were not possessors, but stewards. What they spoke was not their own but God's. He had trusted them the treasures of His truth, and they had opened those hidden treasures to others.

This was St. Paul's answer to those who made themselves favourites of particular apostles and teachers. Let us now see how the same words were an answer to those who set themselves up above the apostles. Does he say that the Apostles were masters, and the Corinthians servants; the Apostles wise, and the Corinthians foolish? No such thing. He

owed obedience to Him, they had to answer to Him if they neglected His work, or lorded it over the people: and they could not answer to the Lord for themselves without betraying what they owed to Him. Once more, they were stewards of *His mysteries*. They dared not speak merely what would please their people, any more than what would please themselves: truth, God's truth, is not always very pleasant to hear,—as we all know,—and they had no right to speak anything except the truth which God had committed to them.

The Epistle goes on in the same strain. Apostles, being stewards, were bound to be faithful. They must and would be judged as to the faithfulness with which they had done their work. But not their people, was their judge. They asked for no praise. They could only wait for the time when the Lord should come and bring to light the things of darkness and lay bare the thoughts of men's hearts.

Here then the Epistle brings us to thought of the Advent; and we are taught to wait in patience for the great light of judgement which will shew all the right and wrong of actions which are beyond the power of any human eyes to understand rightly.

The Gospel for to-day is somewhat different. It gives us one of the most striking stories in the Lord's life. John the Baptist's course of preparation for Him.

FOR THE LORD'S COMING

look for another?" to which Jesus answered, "Go and shew John again those things which ye hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them: and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me." When the disciples were gone, Jesus spoke to the people about John himself, a prophet, and more than a prophet. "For this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare the way before thee."

If we read this passage as an Advent lesson, merely as it occurs in the Gospel, we are taught to consider the hopes of the Jews about their coming Messiah as intended to guide in some measure our own thoughts and hopes for the future. Jesus of Nazareth, to whom John the Baptist sent his disciples, was "He that should come": His answer meant that He was then come. Some disciples of John had wished to worship him as the Corinthians did Paul, or Apollos, or Peter. He, like the Father, pointed to the true Christ as their true Lord: and the Christ here repeats the same. But He does not reject John or take away from the greatness of his office as a prophet, and more than a prophet. Only He marks him out as a messenger sent before to prepare the way for the true Messiah. He had preached, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand": and this was the right preparation

expressed in the Gospel is the foundation Collect. It speaks of the Christian ministry far as they carry on the work of John the Baptist. This is only a part of their true work. Their highest and highest work is to tell the good news of which has already come. But it is also their duty to prepare the way of Him as yet coming, and to prepare His coming in the spirit of John the Baptist. "O Lord Jesus Christ," we pray, "who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger, that is, John the Baptist, to prepare thy way before thee: Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, that at thy second coming thou mayest find us to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight."

But we must not forget who first spoke these words quoted by our Lord. They are the words of Malachi, the last of the old prophets. He has wearied the Lord with your words," he says in the last verse of his 2nd chapter: "Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgement?" One great sin of the Jews in Malachi's time was this mixing up of good and evil, worshipping God after a manner, and living sinful and abominable lives. They were to be judged, because judgement means the separating of good from evil, and letting each be

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ever visit the earth to execute righteous judgement, they asked in scorn and mockery, Where is thy God of judgement? And this was God's answer by the mouth of Malachi, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare my way before me; and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the new covenant, whom ye delight in: he shall come and saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire." The Lord would come in very deed, and would send hot fires of trouble and suffering to purify away their dross and purify whatever true gold there might be within them. But before He came He would send His messenger to prepare His way before Him. The last verses of the prophecy, part of which I have read as a text, tell us more about God's messenger. "Remember ye the law of Moses my servant which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgements. Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." Before John the Baptist was born, an angel repeated this prophecy to his father Zacharias as finding a fulfilment in Him: and from the angel

ing the hearts of the disobedient to the
of the just. In this manner the Gospel was
filled up with increased force, and John the
becomes a link to join the terrible warnings
old prophet of the Jews with the Christian
of Advent.

We sometimes think that the grace and
of the Gospel have brought to nothing for
stern commands of the Law. We like to d
those parts of the Bible which set forth the
ance and the glory which Christ has bought
people with His own blood, and we cast its
words out of our sight as belonging to a state
we have long left behind us. Or perhaps we
year after year doing what we know to be
never making one effort to live a godly life, c
ing ourselves with the hope that God is what
merciful, and that He will somehow let us
punishment which we deserve, if only we
offend Him by any very crying sins; and
Christ's death will make up for all our shortc
Let us be assured, brethren, that, while we
such a state of mind, we are not in a way t
by God's infinite mercy or Christ's rede
Because He is so merciful, nay rather, beca
loves us so deeply in spite of all our cold and
less calculations, He will not let us go t
punishments have brought us to a better
This is a lesson for all times, but it has an

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for the coming blessedness, cries aloud, "Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel with the statutes and the judgements." Not that we may vainly strive to earn a title to blessedness by our profitable good deeds, but that we may become more fit and able to rejoice in the presence of our Lord and King, let us strive before Christmas comes to remember the law of Moses, God's servant, which speaks to us in ten commandments every Sunday, and to keep it better than we have ever done before. Although Christ's first coming has not opened any way of blessedness for those who refuse to do God's will, yet it has given us such helps as were unknown to the men of old time. We know that the Spirit of God is given to us that we may be able by His aid to do such things as by ourselves we cannot do. We know now the very heart and mind of our Lord and Judge; how through Him the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the dead are raised, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them. And yet that same Lord came in terrible judgement to His temple not many years after He had ascended up on high, and the horrors of the day of the Lord in disobedient and ungodly Jerusalem are a byword to this hour. And so will He come again; but He does not come without warning. Noah preached in vain before the flood. Elijah vainly rebuked Ahab and the House of Israel. John

this Advent season is a like warning, to the
and to all others, to turn and seek the Lord
the coming of a yet more great and dreadful
Till we have striven to obey the Baptist's
repentance, since the kingdom of heaven is at
we cannot know our own weakness or the power
sin. But, blessed be God, the Baptist is not
He that should come. When we have submitted
be his disciples, we shall see and hear him point
to One mightier than himself and saying, "Behold
the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the
world."

V

THE BIRTHDAY OF THE SON OF MAN

“FORASMUCH then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood also himself likewise took part of the same.”—*Heb. ii. 14* pt.

ON Whitsunday last I said that the course of our services brings before us two birthdays, Christmas Day, the birthday of our Lord Himself, and Whitsunday, the birthday of the Church. Let us turn to-day to think of Christmas in this light. Let us dwell upon it chiefly as the greatest and best of birthdays.

There are, I am afraid, a great many of us to whom one day is just like another except so far as it brings something to their own personal pleasure or comfort, or takes something away from it; to whom the word ‘birthday’ calls up no thought on which they care particularly to dwell. To such there is not much use in speaking about Christmas, whether as the Lord’s birthday or in any other way. It is hopeless to talk about Christ and God to those

those whose ears are deaf to all sounds alike. Many there are now present of whom this God only knows. I can but speak, in the hope that the hearts of some at least, though it be only here and another there, will answer to the words.

Why do we care for birthdays? They go on like other days. For the most part they have the same work without, the same anxieties within. Birthdays do not really make then any great advance in our lives, only in our way of counting our lives. It is all the change that does really take place in our lives that comes on quietly and steadily all the year round, and is not like another. It makes no sudden leaps. If we have healthy hearts, our own birthdays do a good deal to us, and so do those of others that are dear to us by ties of affection. On ordinary days our attention is taken up with the things of the moment, the little daily businesses or pleasures which crowd down our thoughts and keep them from ranging over a wide field, compelling us to look only at what is before our feet. On birthdays we pause and we single out in our thoughts the person to whom the day belongs.

If it is our own birthday, the day is full of joy and innocent pride to us when we are young. It gives us the pleasant assurance that we have taken a new step into that bright new world which opens itself to us more and more, and seems to invite us on. It marks our gain of fresh powers of receiving the light of the world.

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interest for us, though it has lost much of its gl
ness. It leads us to look forwards and backwa
with eyes fixed on nothing but ourselves; not
may be in any selfish and unworthy manner,
because all that has ever happened to ourselves h
and *must* have, a peculiar worth for us. We
then enabled to look on ourselves as creatures
a long and various growth, the self-same beings t
we were many years ago, for all that has come a
gone since then. If our thoughts are grave—and
is hard to see how they can be otherwise at s
times,—they must lead us back to the days when
were children, and forward to the days when
shall be helpless and feeble till the end of
earthly life comes.

Not altogether different is the interest which
feel in the birthdays of others for whom we ca
On that day the parent, let us say, or brother
sister, stands out before our mind away from
confusion of surrounding things. Our love for h
or her puts on something almost of a religi
character for the moment. We think of everyth
chiefly as it concerns him. Our hopes and wis
are for the time turned towards him and his welf
We are led to notice the place which he fills in
common life; we call to mind what we owe to h
and what the gap would be were he taken away.

Perhaps you may think this an overstrained d
cription of the state of mind natural to any ordin
person on a birthday: and I do not suppose that

vague and mixed feeling which has a place in the birthday in most of those who are not selfish. It is hard, partly pleasure, partly interested excitement, partly simple love, would take some such form as I have described, were it possible to put it into words, and I say further that if thoughts like these are so common to us, the fault is ours, and the loss is ours: we are strangers to that which might be for our peace and our strength.

I have not yet spoken of a third kind of birthday, the birthdays of those whom death has taken from among us. They have what I can only call the holiness of their own. They bring back to us recollections which touch all that is best and dearest in us, recollections which have for a time at least a power over even the hardened in gross sin so that it seems denied to almost every other good influence. Such birthdays are Sabbaths of God's own making, interrupting the ceaseless flow of thought, business or sin, laying bare the deep of God and His kingdom, laying bare at the same time the answers deep far down in our own disorderly hearts. These days are yearly monuments of the dead which stand before us on our way, and compel us to read what is written on them. Their power is two-fold: they appeal to whatever natural affection is yet left undestroyed within us, freed from the petty passions and jealousies which so often poison it when those whom we love are still by our side: they speak at the same time

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of it by the sudden stoppage of an earthly life. I do not too much to say that the birthdays of those whom we have loved bear the mark of eternity upon them. They make it difficult for us, if we attend to them at all, to believe steadily that we are creatures of a different nature than those creatures that follow their proper nature when they are devouring their fodder and wallowing in their filth like the swine. No doubt the holiness, the heaviness belonging to such birthdays would be lost if grief were cast out of them. But that is a part of God's gracious order at which we must be made indifferent if we repine. For those who will submit to this schooling, such grief is the entrance into sure peace and even sure joy: and assuredly to quench grief wilfully in selfish thoughtlessness, at times when it would naturally make itself felt within us, is a certain way to shut ourselves off from heaven and all that heaven contains.

I have spoken at some length of ordinary birthdays, birthdays of ourselves, of the living, of the dead. I said no more, it would be a fitting and instructive subject for to-day, the greatest of birthdays. But I should be sorry to stop here, for we have reached only a small part of the truth that concerns us, if we keep out of sight Him who was born as on this day. That our common experience of common birthdays has taught us or can teach us is needed to enable us to understand what is contained in the birthday of Christ. And again, every birthday will henceforth be to us more full of meaning, more to be prized up

blessed thoughts which only close converse with Christmas can bring.

For who is this Christ who was born on this day? He is known to us by many names, which serve to mark different parts of His work. But which of these names concern us most to-day? Surely most of all that by which He chiefly delighted to call Himself *Son of Man*. He was on earth, the Son of Man; a man like the rest of men, the son of an earthly mother and a true member of the race of men; but more than a man who was not only *a* son of man but *the* Son of Man, one who as being also the Son and the Father of the Everlasting Father was the Head and Center of all men, the Life of their life, the Light of their life, the brother of each and every man, but more than a brother, the elder brother of all; the one man who is so closely connected with each and all of us that no one of us can be with any other. We forget this because we do not see Him among us. Yet it is surely true. Any bond that attaches us to another human creature, attaches us also to Him. Every blessing which we can receive through any human creature, we can receive in fuller measure through Him. Just because He has an eternal heavenly birth as well as an earthly birth, He belongs to no one time or country more than another. He is as near to us, as much our neighbor as He was more than 1800 years ago to the household of Nazareth. But it is on account

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birthday in just the same sense in which we speak of all birthdays.

Consider what worth and honour and height of thought gives to ourselves and all other men. He who was born at Bethlehem is brother to us, then we too are brothers to Him, brothers that are to the glorious Son of God. And if this be so, think what fresh interest it gives to our own birthdays and the birthdays of others whom we love. If, as I said just now, our birthdays are the times on which we naturally let our minds dwell on our own lives, looking backward to our infancy and forward to our old age, and gathering up into one the whole long thread of our existence between, then how much more notable days do they become, when we learn that we too are partakers, as St. Peter says, of a divine nature, and citizens of the kingdom of heaven! We, like Christ, are travelling to God who is our home: everything that befalls us by the way presents itself to our sight in brighter lights and darker shadows than it can wear while we live as mere creatures of the earth. Thoughts like these can never foster an evil pride. Rather they humble us terribly when we remember our own shortcomings, making us see how poor and pitiful our best doings are, how unworthy of our high calling; filling us with shame at the dark depths of sin into which we sometimes plunge our heaven-born souls.

And as the birth of Christ raises our own birthdays to a higher honour, so does it also make

more must they be precious to us as sharers in the heavenly kingdom. We all know what a difference it makes in our feelings towards any one whom we can be proud of him as well as love him ; our hearts are lifted up to a higher mood by the position at which he stands. And this is most true in the case of that highest height on which every brother of Christ must stand. Must not they be precious in our sight whom we know to be precious in God's sight, whom we must believe to be taking a part in His great service as well as in the service of the world, the narrow service, of our own daily life ?

And surely I need not point out what a difference the birth of Christ makes in the birthdays of those who are gone from among us. It cannot take away the solemn veil through which we look back at their memories. It leaves the other world as wonderful as ever. But it forbids us to think of them as though they were gone out into an eternal darkness, a cold dim region of emptiness, barren of the life and motion which fill our earthly existence. We cannot indeed pretend to pierce into the secret of the world which God has for wise purposes hidden from our eyes. We dare not make blind guesses which can do us only harm. But we know that wherever a brother of Christ may be, he is not beyond the reach of Him who is the Light and Life of all created things ; we know that he is not forgotten by the spotless Elder Brother,

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And now, brethren, let us turn and see what may learn about Christmas itself from all this. It is well in due season to have our thoughts about ourselves raised, to remember with worthier care the living or the dead. But this is not enough. Our hearts and lives will still be distracted and bewildered if they are not gathered together and lifted up in love and adore their one Lord, the Way, the Truth and the Life, through whom the Father makes Himself known to us, and we ascend to the Father. If we have neglected Him till now, when is it so easy to begin to love and adore Him as on this the day of His birth?

He who throned in clouds shall come
Judge Eternal from above,
From His cradle calls and asks
By His own His people's love.

Christmas Day is the birthday of one who has died and yet lives for evermore. He is at once present among us and absent from us. As regards His bodily form He is gone away from the earth, the which He once walked like us. But that departure brings to us no painful memories as of a personal loss. We never looked upon His face, or touched His hands, or listened to the words which came forth from His lips. Such bitter regrets as the Apostles must have felt to the end of their days we can never know. And yet we are made sharers in the blessing

it and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was shewn unto us; that which we,—we the Apostles—have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. Paul wrote an Apostle in his eagerness to give us a share in the happy knowledge which had made him a new man. But what gave that knowledge its highest worth—nay, we may say, all its worth, the crowning part of it, the knowledge that the life which had not been the end of the holy life which began the first Christmas Day at Bethlehem. The Father who sent His Only Begotten into the world, who also raised Him from the dead to the living, who raised Him from the earth once more to His own right hand. Our regrets then must be for ourselves, not for Him. There is no meaning in keeping a mere recollection of His birth, if we are not carried on to His eternal life which at this moment and at every moment He is holding out for us to lay hold of.

Do not say it is useless to cherish the day when His earthly course began. Let no one persuade you that it is enough to read about Him and pray to Him at all times. Yes, that is our duty and our blessing; but do you find it easy? His life and His life do indeed belong to all days of the year: but then how does that come to mean to *no* day of the year that none are marked as specially His. If other birth-

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no one is able to forget it, though how many for what it means ! Whether we listen or not, the voice sounds forth out of the darkness and seeming death of winter. The news is proclaimed—so old, yet ever new—that we have an Elder Brother in heaven. We are invited to gather round His holy table to eat the bread and drink the wine, claiming our part of the mighty brotherhood which fills heaven and earth, giving thanks for the wondrous love which stooped to death that we might be one in Him, one with Him. If we listen to the call, we must be ready to enter on a purer life, to lay aside everything which can estrange us from the Holy One : but we shall be drawn nearer to each other in drawing nearer to Him ; we shall find a new day dawning in our hearts, and we know that its light is from heaven.

VI

THE STAR OF THE WISE MEN

“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen a star in the East, and are come to worship him.”—*Matt.* ii. 1, 2.

THESE two verses are the beginning of the story which this season of Epiphany is founded, and which point out to us at starting one of the chief lessons which that story is meant to teach to all Christians. They draw our thoughts to two very different scenes, by telling us that these things happened in the days of Herod the king, and by reporting the quest of the wise men from the East, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? St. Matthew would not have us think of the two kings together, the mad Herod surrounded by his soldiers in his splendid palace, and the babe Jesus, the son of the carpenter's wife, in the little country village of Bethlehem.

that poor and helpless child who was indeed the Lord of Glory.

Next we hear what came to pass in Herod's day. "Behold there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the East, and are come to worship him." These wise men lived long way off beyond the wilderness. They were not exactly worshippers of the one true God, but neither were they given up to bowing down to idols like many of their neighbours; and we might say of them in our Lord's words, that they were not far from the kingdom of God. Their great occupation was to watch the stars, as their fathers had done for many generations before them. Probably enough they had many foolish fancies about the stars, and thought that they would foretell the fortunes of men in ways that we now know to be impossible. But still no doubt they learnt many true and wholesome lessons from looking up at the sky on clear starlight nights: it was their appointed work, and God saw fit to teach them by it.

But how was it that their star-gazing made them think of coming to Bethlehem? The reason was that in the East, where they lived, stars had for ages been looked upon as heavenly signs of great earthly kings. Some of you may remember how, when the children of Israel were going through the wilderness, Balaam, the prophet of another Eastern people,

that at the time of our Lord's coming there was a general expectation throughout the East that a mighty Jewish king was about to arise who would establish his power on every side. To the Jews in those lands it was a wonderful sight to see the Jews in their little spot of land, crushed and cut off by one conqueror after another, and yet still so proud and untamed. We cannot be surprised that they looked for a great king to arise among a people so strangely favoured by the power of heaven.

No doubt these wise men were full of this expectation, when one night they saw a bright star in the sky where none had been before. They at once began to search for reasons unknown to us, that this star was the sign of the expected king of the Jews, and they started from Jerusalem, the chief city of the Jews, to find him. Now let us return to St. Matthew, and see how the wise men were received when they got there. "When the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and he began to call all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written in the prophet: (then follows a quotation from Micah). Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said Go and search diligently for the child, and tell me, so that I may come and worship him."

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Here we see how the great Herod on his throne was troubled when he heard the wise men's errand. All the innocent blood that he had shed to get rid of possible rivals, all the soldiers who did his bidding, all the might of Rome which was ready to back him, were not enough to encourage him at this sound of a true king of the Jews being born at last. He and his ill-gotten kingdom trembled at the birth of an infant. He knew that the people themselves were looking for such an one to appear in due time : so he sent for the chief priests and scribes, who by their learning were most likely to be able to understand ancient prophecies, and asked them where the Christ, the promised Messiah, should be born. Relying on Micah's words, they said in Bethlehem. Thus much they thought they were able to gather from the prophet. To Bethlehem therefore he sent the wise men, having at the time dark plans of his own, which do not however concern us to-day. They followed his advice and left Jerusalem, but no sooner had they set off than the star, which they had seen some time ago in the east, now appeared once more and cheered them onward on the remaining part of their journey. While they walked along the road southward toward Bethlehem, there it was up in the sky right before them shining as brightly as ever : and as they went on and on, it seemed to go before them too. When at last they reached Bethlehem, and came near the house where the young child was, it still shone up in the sky above the house and they saw it and rejoiced.

mother, and fell down and worshipped him, and they had opened their treasures, they presented him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. being warned of God in a dream that they not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way."

We cannot tell what they expected to see when they reached the house: at all events there was nothing to make us think that they were disappointed in what they found. They had travelled all that distance with their store of costly gifts to honour the new Eastern king; and there they found without one mark of royalty: no crown or sceptre on the throne. But that did not turn them away. They knew that they and the East and the whole world could wait for the day when He would inaugurate a kingdom known in His glory. They were men not dazzled by the mere show of kingship. Accustomed for many a year to live face to face with the world, they could see too far into the truth of things to be easily deceived by either the presence or the absence of earthly grandeur. To them Herod and his empire would seem but as a thing of yesterday, just starting into being, and probably doomed to disappear as quickly, like a passing cloud. The Roman Empire to which he paid a kind of homage, was older than his, but it too must have seemed new and perishable in their eyes. Not so the new-born king, whom they had found at Bethlehem. They did not judge

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really was, but they did homage to Him as one higher than themselves; as St. Matthew says, they worshipped Him. Then they presented to Him the gifts which they had brought with them, the best natural produce of their country, gold, frankincense and myrrh. They did not come to gain anything for themselves. They came to do homage to Him and present offerings as outward signs of their reverence. Like the shepherds, they saw the infant King, and the sight of Him and the thoughts which awakened within them were all that they carried away with them from Bethlehem. God warned them in a dream that they should not return to Herod, and so they returned to their own country by another way, and we hear no more of them.

This then, brethren, is the story in honour of which to-day is called the Epiphany, the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles. Even in infancy our blessed Lord was not shewn only to His own people the Jews. Those faithful wise men, who came from the East to seek Him out, were allowed also to refresh themselves with the sight. In this they stand as an example of the millions of Gentiles and ourselves among the number, to whom His Name should in after days be made known. The vast importance of this making known of Christ to the Gentiles and the light which it throws upon God's whole plan of salvation for us men are well worth of being remembered; but to-day there is time only

the way in which they were brought to see Christ. This is pointed out in the Collect for the Epiphany: "O God, who by the leading of a star didst bring thy only begotten Son to the Gentiles." I have already explained how they came to look for the Messiah, how it was that a star could be used as a means of guiding them to him. But what you especially to notice is this, that it was not their own common and proper occupation of work and studying the stars that God led them the right way to behold His Son. This is an example of the way in which He always works. We are apt to think that any occupation rather than another is the best and easiest for serving God. We tell ourselves, 'If only my business in life were different from what it now is, how willingly and readily I would devote myself to a holy and religious life.' This, brethren, is the greatest of delusions. We may say that all occupations are equally ennobling, equally helpful in leading our hearts to God. But I think that there are none which rightly used may not lead us to Him, none which wrongly used may not estrange us from Him.

I do not want so much to-day to speak about the different temptations to sin which beset us in whatever our calling in life may be: that is another subject: the example of the wise men leads us rather to think of the way in which our calling in life may help to bring God into our thoughts or banish

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we are, and whatever we may be doing. It is His providence that we find ourselves in this or that position. Some few of us may perhaps choose our own occupations for ourselves, though far fewer than people suppose; even in those cases there is something *without* ourselves which points to and directs the choice. But most of us are led to the employments of our life by the state in which our parents happen to be, or by the persons with whom in early years we chance to be thrown. Now all this is God's appointment. He having the charge of human affairs, has various kinds of work which He wants to be done, some by this man, some by that. And we, though we may fancy that we are guided to our work only by our own wishes or necessities or the chances of our birth or education, are in fact being placed by the Lord of the whole world where it seems good to Him.

And when He has set us there, He does not leave us to ourselves, but keeps watch over us. We are not indeed His mere instruments blind and dead tools in His hand, for Him to work out his purposes with. No, He cares for us, for each one of us, as well as for the work which He sets us to do. He allows us the power of disobedience. We are, I say, not tools but His servants, nay more, His children. We are very apt to leave our work undone or done negligently when we are not driven by sheer necessity. But the curse of neglect comes back to us in a thousand ways, and most of all in the want

all God Himself and all that is most Godlike becomes nearly a blank to us, and we live as only at random. How far otherwise is it when we accept willingly the work set us to do, and with all our might! The very effort brings much which had seemed to vanish from us, and we stand once more at one with God and with all that is working along with Him throughout His creation.

It is not however merely the *doing* our duty which brings us into a healthful state: it is the duty itself, whatever that may be, watching of stars, or feeding of flocks, or digging of fields, or teaching of others. Wherever our duty lies, we cannot but be employed about something which bears the mark of being the handiwork of God, and which may lead us to Him if we follow out the thoughts which He causes to rise in our hearts. Our God is not like a heathen deity with only one character, not a mere God of victory, or God of peace, or God of light, or God of love, or God of wisdom. He is all these and many more: He has, as it were, many sides on which we may approach Him. Christ, His Son, is the Son of Man; all that is in man belongs to Him, and all that belongs to all that is in man. The star which led the wise men from the East to His cradle is but a sign of the manifold things in heaven and earth which are known to us with our eyes or known by our minds, by which He draws us to Himself, and through Himself to His Father in Heaven.

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presents intended for His use : for, whatever may be the thought of gold, one sees not what He could do with frankincense or myrrh. And secondly, they were just the things, the most precious things, found in their own country. Here surely is a lesson to ourselves of the kind of sacrifices with which God is well pleased. He needs none of our gifts ; all the earth is His, and the fulness thereof : we have nothing which we have not received from Him. But there must be a poor and feeble love to him which does not strive to *shew* itself in gifts to Him, in sacrifices to Him. So far as they are the marks of our devotion in His all-seeing eye, so far is He well pleased with them. And it is of our own that we must make offerings to Him. Whatever it may be that He has blessed us with, time, or money, or knowledge, or bodily strength, or anything else that can be put to use upon earth and that we do use in our daily employment, it is of these that we are bound to make offerings to Him, taking from that which we might keep for our own use and enjoyment, to give to Him, or which is the same thing in other words, to employ for His brethren or for whatever good work and advancement of His kingdom lies near to our hand.

Next, these wise men are to us an example of faith. They are presented to us as such in the Collect which says, "we, who know thee now by faith." Faith is in Scripture opposed to sight ; we walk by faith, and not by sight ; faith is the assurance of things

ward appearance : above all, to believe in the God, and believing in Him to trust Him even when we cannot see our own way. Now this was what the wise men did. It needed much faith first to call a king of the Jews at all, then to leave their own country and take a long journey to see Him, and then to be so much more than all not to be staggered when they found Him so low through faith they were not dazzled by the greatness of Herod or withheld from worship by the low estate of Him whom they found lying in the manger. In all these things God's leading them would have been of little use to them if they had not had faith to follow His leading.

It is the same when God would fain lead us to His Son and to Himself. There is no power which compels us. We may refuse to see that the way is a way of blessedness, and we may refuse to let His will and not our own conduct us along it. This is because we want faith. Perhaps we are drowned in earthly cares or earthly pleasures and have no eye for the true unseen good, which is everlastingly blessed. Perhaps we see that there is full of powerful men and powerful things which do not obey God at all, and yet which seem to call before them. Perhaps we even despise what is low and small to our eyes. While this is the case, lacking in faith, and refusing God's guidance, we must learn to love goodness for its own sake, and recognize it even when it is naked and see

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God upon it and is strong with His everlasting strength, because we deceive ourselves with outward appearances. If we needed any proof, we have only to think how Jesus Christ emptied Himself and took upon Him the form of a servant when He appeared among men: and now as ever the best test of faith in man, as also the highest glory for man, is to be willing like the wise men to worship at the feet of the lowly and despised Saviour.

But the Collect for to-day points out a higher goal which may be reached in this way and in no other. "Mercifully grant that we which know thee now by faith may after this life have the fruition, that is, the enjoyment, of thy glorious Godhead." The wise men sought and found the king of the Jews because they believed in a King of heaven. We may not linger with Christ, we must mount by Him, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, unto the Father Himself. In this life our knowledge of Christ and of God is scattered and imperfect: but just so much as we do know them and love them, so much shall we strive to know them more, and long for the time when they shall be perfectly unveiled. We need faith to see God at all, the things of God in the midst of the things which hide Him from our view. It may be said in a certain sense that He is a hidden God, and even that He hides Himself. But it is not because He does not wish us to see Him and know Him. This Feast of the Epiphany is a sure pledge that His delight is to be known, and that a day shall come when the

all at once, we *could* not see him : we should be blinded by blinding glory, and no more. It is part by part. He makes Himself known to us, according to our faith : the more we trust Him unseen, the more we do in fact see Him. And this enlightening faith can never be barren : if it is true, it also fashions our lives after what we see of Him. When He shall appear, we shall be truly like Him, for we shall have seen Him as He is. Brethren, keep this hope within yourselves, if you have any desire to be blessed in this or the next. Believe that He is always drawing you homewards, drawing you in His own best way. He seems to hide Himself from you, believe that He does only to try your faith, that you may at last wait patiently and be satisfied with beholding His face in righteousness.

O Christ, whom now beneath a veil we see,
May what we thirst for soon our portion be,
To gaze on Thee, and see with unveiled face
The vision of Thy glory and Thy grace.

VII

THE LORD ABOVE THE WATERFLOODS

“THE Lord sitteth above the waterflood : and the Lord remaineth king for ever. The Lord shall give strength unto his people : the Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace.”—*Psalms* xxix. 9, 10

THIS twenty-ninth Psalm is a remarkable one in various ways. Elsewhere in the Psalms and other books of the Bible we find mention made of what we call nature and natural objects, the outward world of earth and sky : but nowhere do they so fill the mind as here. It was a common feeling with the religious Jews that the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth His handiwork, that He waters the hills from above and fills the earth with the fruit of His work, that He brings forth grass for the cattle, and green herb for the service of men. In their thankfulness they were ready to say, “O Lord how manifold are Thy works : in wisdom hast Thou made them all : the earth is full of Thy riches.” On a clear

which He had ordained, and ask with wor-
devotion how the great Being who made the he-
host could condescend to think of man and
him and put all things in subjection unde-
But here in the twenty-ninth Psalm the Psalmist
first to last hurries us along in one burst of p-
ate praise, which is the more striking wh-
consider what it was that inspired it. He
aloud to the mighty, that is, to the ang-
heaven, to give unto the Lord glory and st-
to give Him the honour due unto His na-
worship Him with a holy worship. Next we
what had roused him to this pitch of lofty t-
giving. It was that he had heard the vo-
the Lord speaking to him and to mankind
of the heaven above. And what was this v-
the Lord which so impressed him that he
it again and again in the next seven verses
was a tremendous thunderstorm, much more
and incessant than any that we are accustom-
in this country, most terrifying to see and
most destructive in its effects on the works o-
He had marked how it came forth from th-
mighty in operation, how it made the solid
tains tremble and seem to skip like a ca-
broke the strong cedar trees which clothed
sides; how it came down into the plain, s-
before it divided flames, torn and shattered
of lightning, till it reached the far distant wil-

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him the most fervent adoration of the Lord on his knees, and brought before his eyes, as he finished his song, a vision of strength and of peace.

But it will do us little good, brethren, to wonder at the Psalm, if we do not try to follow its train of thought and learn from it, if possible, how to guide our own hearts in a way which we cannot but feel to be blessed, even when we do not understand it. The first thing we have to observe is very simple. It is only this, that the Psalmist's heart was fully open to receive the whole impression which the thunderstorm with all its awful sights and sounds could make upon him. Perhaps you will say that that is no great matter, that even one but a madman would be impressed at such a time as that. I do not think so. There are great many people in the world to whom nothing is awful, a great many who could pass through the most soul-stirring scenes without any deeper feeling being awakened than a passing curiosity, who value themselves on never being put out of their wits, as they call it, by anything, and let all that does not concern their own pleasure or their own business pass by them without leaving any mark upon their minds or exciting any interest. In men of such hide-bound natures it is plain that the very first beginning of such an impression as was made on the Psalmist is impossible.

But this, I well know, is not the commonest case. Most of us are not so much insensible as head-

that is of little use. The lower creatures are ened and bewildered too. The impression which *should* receive is one worthy of men; not a and helpless crouching before a power which we not resist, lasting only while we are in its immediate presence; but a serious and thoughtful awe, which leaves us for the future better and wiser than we found us.

And this brings me to the second character of the Psalmist's mind. Not only was he open to receive all that that thunderstorm might have to say, but he found in it the voice of God. When he looked up to the sky and beheld the wild powers there, he knew that that was no battle of lifeless and senseless powers. The lightning and the water might be strong, but he believed them to be the ministers of One stronger than they, One who was Lord and Master of all the heavens and of the earth, One without whose will not a cloud gather, not a drop could fall. And thus far from that many of us could in a measure go with him, we have any belief at all in the Maker and Ruler of the world, we can hardly help being reminded of Him when His voice sounds in our ears with unerring power. It may bring no meaning to our minds, only a perverse and evil meaning: but we do in that manner feel that the voice is His, and that He is mightier than we.

But there remains a third stage in the Psalmist's

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was "the Lord," Jehovah, the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, One who vouchsafed to call Israel His own people, One who was bound to the earth and to men who lived upon it by the ties of a covenant and a care and a love, to forget which was to worship another God under His name. In the early days of the people, when they came out of Egypt and were gathered before Mount Sinai to receive God's law by the hand of Moses, they had stood in the presence of a scene like this. In front of them, in the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "was a mount that burned with fire, and around them was blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more; and so terrible was the sight that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake. But when God spoke, what were the first words with which He prepared the people to receive His law? "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." The dark cloud and the fire were signs of the presence of One who desired to be known first and foremost as a saving and delivering God. One who by the word of His power had broken the yoke of cruel enemies without; and who now by the wholesome restraints of His own holy law was going to help His people to break for themselves the yoke of worse enemies within, even the evil passions which

other men when he stood and looked and while the storm raged on. Wonder and abasement, the natural effects of a sight so hostile to the pride of man, were among the feelings he could not and would not drive out. But they did not overwhelm him. They bred in him the memory of the behaviour of a slave. He could hold his head with proud confidence, knowing that he was owned and tended by Him who made the thunder. Nor was this all, he delighted, he gloried, in the power which made him tremble. It seemed an announcement to the whole land that the Lord was King, King for evermore; and what happier news could be borne from heaven to earth? It was the most familiar of all truths. Yes, but so familiar that it had lost its meaning. It was on the lips of every one, and in the hearts only of one here and another there, and that only by fits and starts. The Psalmist himself perhaps was conscious how hard he found it to remember it, remember it, that he held true belief as a thing to be acted on and lived by. The quiet smiling sky looked down day by day upon the ordinary occupations of men. Man went to his work and to his labour until the evening. The fruits of the earth yielded him good food. The living things upon the earth obeyed him. The Lord seemed to reign with undisputed lordship over every part of the earth to which he belonged. Occasional loss or failure might remind him that he was

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One like the Psalmist, who felt how prone he and other men were to fall into this way of thinking and at the same time what spiritual death lurked in it, might well exult when God's awful voice was heard out of heaven. The tempest first disturbed and mocked at the lordship of man. Then to an Israelite who knew anything about his country's worship it suggested the thought of One who was sitting high above both man and tempest, reigning a King for ever. To be reminded of this might not be, could not be, pleasant for those who wished to be as gods to themselves. But the Psalmist knew that it was good for all alike to hear it: and so each roar of the thunder was music to his ears as a fresh assurance that his gracious King was at work and doing. And his joy at once became gratitude and his song took the form of praise. The welcome sound of the present voice of the Lord was also a pledge of greater blessings to come. That stormy ruler of the thunder was willing and ready to make His people sharers in His strength. That peace which He enjoyed, fixed in His everlasting seat above all the storms which vex and alarm the earth, He would gladly bestow on His people too. Apart from Him strength and peace were but idle names. Whatever bore witness of His presence and His mighty working was also a promise that strength and peace were laid up in store for those whom He had called to be His own.

here who has not heard the news which has reached us this week of the dreadful death of some one known in this neighbourhood, who joined us so lately as on Christmas Day in the Communion, the last Communion of which we were to partake on earth. Of themselves the grief which has fallen upon those to whom we were most dear I do not propose to speak. Those are subjects which, in this place at least, are more fitly honoured by silence than by any words that could be spoken. Yet I would not wish to be silent altogether on what nearly concerns ourselves. There has been and is, I feel sure, in the minds of most of us a personal feeling of loss which craves some sort of expression. It cannot be that so strange a calamity, brought so near to us in this neighbourhood, should be passed over without any attempt to make the recollection of it profitable for good.

I have no intention or wish to bring before you all the thoughts which might well be stirred up in the memories of this week. Some are common enough, and rather lose than gain in force by being put into words: moreover they might be excited easily by many events of not uncommon occurrence. I would rather try to fix your minds on a subject which more especially belongs to the present, even the lesson which the psalm itself supplies, and some perhaps the joyful and triumphant tone

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violence to natural feelings of this kind. We need not try to think that the exulting strain of the earlier part of the psalm is what best befits us now. But the spirit of faith, which is the hidden life of the whole psalm, is one most worthy to be cherished now, and the closing verses which form my text cannot be out of keeping with any Christian mood.

We, brethren, are not accustomed to see the powers of nature, the winds and the waves, putting forth all their most terrific force and fury to destroy man and the proudest works of his hands. We are not accustomed to see hundreds of our fellow creatures swallowed up in a moment, in this or in any other way, by a resistless and terrible destruction. We know something of death. It has been here around among us of late with greater frequency than usual. But we are strangers to its wilder and more violent forms. Now all of a sudden we are made sadly familiar with what was before matter of too distant hearsay to move us. First then let the psalm teach us how we may look without dismay on these new visions that have risen up before us. If we are troubled and disturbed at the rage of the waterfloods which seem as if they broke loose from the order and laws of God, let us believe that He does indeed stand above them, commanding them whither to go, setting them their bounds which they shall not pass, holding them always as the obedient servants of His Will. Sometimes He calls His children to Himself one by

quick steps or slow. They have but passed one mansion of their Father's house to another. The King who was over them in this life abides their King still and for ever. All His acts, those which most seem to cast scorn on weakness and tear man's heart with sorrow and dismay, are the acts of One who is ever striving to build up His people, so far as they will let Him. His strength and peace that cannot be shaken.

Again, the psalm has a further lesson in store for us. If it is well to learn to look with calmness and hope on new and shocking forms of disaster, it is at the same time, say the least, no less well to learn to look on disaster without *indifference*, to gather from them the precious instruction which they are designed to give. Life with most of us, as it creeps on from the cradle to the grave, is apt to be a poor and languid life. This comes in no small measure from improvement in the state of mankind which are under the influence of blessings, and which we are bound most truly to thank God for. There was a time when it might be said with little exaggeration that every man carried death in his hand, when murder, robbery, and every other outrage might come unexpectedly upon a man, whatever his occupation, from the lawlessness and violence of manners. As peaceful arts grew, commerce prospered, and better laws were made and better enforced, that state of disorder passed away, except in times of war; and now for more than

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earthquakes which in some parts of the world suddenly destroy thousands of people are unknown here. Disease is always more or less among us, and sometimes with terrible power; but we most often escape the sweeping and startling kinds of death which often have changed the whole appearance of life for the survivors. Now our gain in this respect is not all gain. Along with safety has come much feebleness and dulness of heart and brain, much deadness to all high and burning thoughts for God or man. We are apt to be soon swallowed up in the little employments, the little cares, the little pleasures or troubles of our own single lives, and we drag heavily on from day to day, from week to week, from year to year, till our threescore years and ten are done without keeping up within us the flow of fresh unselfish life, without which faith in God and Christ finds only a soil too poor and barren to nourish it. If we have become aware of this, we desire to have a keener sense of life and death, and with them of all that belongs to them, surely brethren, we shall welcome as a voice of the Lord whatever breaks in upon our unnatural slumber, though it be mixed with pain and fear. In the day of quiet, and what is falsely called peace, God is still ruling, sitting above the tranquil sunshine or the clinging mist as well as above the roaring waterfloods; but then it is easy to forget Him, easy to dream that we can go through life very well without Him and take our chance for what comes after. Well for us if

in the manner of His working. The first feeling awaking will be a sense of weakness ; a most sense : but strength is then very near. When we range ourselves vigorously on our King's side strength is ours to draw upon. And then, with the beginning of resolute warfare is the beginning of peace too. There is no such restfulness as comes from the thought that all things are fulfilling His Word, and that His Word is goodness itself. This is the true peace, a foretaste of that perfect peace which shall overcome every enemy, and death the last of all, shall be under the feet of His Son, who came that we might have life, and that we might have it abundantly.

VIII

CHRIST THE GOOD MAKER AND DOER

“HE hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak.”—*Mark* vii. 37.

THESE words are reported to us by St. Mark as having been spoken by the wondering multitude, who had seen our Lord restore the deaf and stammering man to hearing and speech, and then flatly disobey the Lord's express command that they should tell no man what they had seen. The words do not lead to any further comment by our Lord or by St. Mark for they form the end of the whole story. Nor is there much in them, in the sense in which they were probably spoken by the multitude, which need greatly draw our thoughts to them. “He hath done all things well” may be no more than a rather unmeaning kind of applause, such as might have been given almost as readily to a conjuror as to the Saviour of men. On some, we may hope, the graciousness of the act and so the gracious purpose

chief feeling must have been one of open-mouthed wonder, such as cannot be fairly called genuine rebellion against Christ's simple command, to which they had ever received from Him.

Yet we may feel tolerably certain that these words bore another and a fuller meaning to St. Mark also to St. Peter, who heard them uttered and repeated them to St. Mark. Many of us must have at some time noticed how words dropped casually and at random about some slight matter seemed to go much further and deeper than intended by the speaker, to convey, as we say, more than was meant, and sometimes to have been prophetic of coming events. Such examples shew us how little our words are our own, how they often are from conveying only the meaning which we are thinking of at the time for the sake of which we use them. For indeed there is a hidden world which lies behind us all the time, long, even the world in which God dwells, and into which He sends His Holy Spirit into our hearts, inspiring the good words that we utter, and sometimes turning even our bad words into unthoughtful messengers of His own Truth, mocking the thoughtless lips which pronounce them.

Bad words the words of the multitudes were which they spoke when they saw the deaf and stammering man healed ; but they were p

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them well worthy of our attention to-day. They were suggested by one particular act of healing: but they well expressed the nature and purpose of all Christ's acts of healing, of all His wonderful acts of whatever kind, and His whole work for us men from the beginning to the present day. St. Mark probably saw in the saying of the multitude an unintended likeness to the language which the book of Genesis (i. 31) uses about the finishing of the work of Creation. "God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good." The words as given by St. Mark are nearly the same, though not obviously so in English: He hath made all things in a good manner: but the later saying goes further than the earlier. All the outward world which God made was good; but the making of the world is only one, and that not the greatest, of His doings: all things whatsoever that He hath done, whether in making the outward or the spiritual world or in ruling them, are all altogether good.

To us who from our childhood upwards have been bred in the faith of Jesus Christ, even as to the Apostles themselves in their later years, the second saying can be no mere repeating of the first. For who is the 'He' in each case? In the book of Genesis we are told that *God* saw every thing that he had made. God therefore was the maker. In St. Mark, when the multitude said, "He hath done all things well"; they were speaking of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Mary. Jesus therefore was the

the Creation was especially His work. All things were made, says St. John, by or through the Word which he afterwards speaks of as become flesh and dwelling among us; and without Him was not anything made that was made. The Nicene Creed, which we read in our Communion Service, repeats the same thing. We there profess to believe in not only in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible, but also in one Lord Jesus Christ the only begotten Son of God, *by whom, or through whom, all things are made.* Thus we are taught that the Father created all things by or through the Son. If we bear this in mind, we may learn a very valuable lesson from St. Mark's record of the words of the text. We, who already believe that He who restored speech and hearing to that poor man was the Son of God Himself, may gather from it much that we ought never to forget both about creation and about the work of Christ on earth, that is, the substance of the Gospel itself.

Creation, in the way we usually think of it, does not appear otherwise than a very cold and distant thing. Some perhaps among us have gained a knowledge of interest in it that is sometimes idle and fruitless enough, sometimes capable of leading to good and wholesome thoughts, by reading what books are written about the more distant parts of creation, the arrangement and movements of the sun, moon,

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careful searching and study bring to light even among the creatures which are always near us, and above all in our own bodies, these sights of creation may stir in our minds some such feelings as those which filled the multitude in the Gospel, not indeed evil, yet not necessarily good: it is often the strangeness of these sights and their distance from us or aloofness from all our daily actions which moves us so very greatly, if we are moved at all. Such thoughts therefore are not fair samples of our thoughts of creation itself, distant or near.

Let us rather take that part of the creation which is never absent from any of us, a few miles of hills and woods and fields, with plants that give us food and animals that give us food and clothing, over our heads a vault sometimes clear, sometimes filled with clouds which give us rain or send forth thunder and lightning, and carrying by day the sun which gives us both light and heat, and by night the moon and stars which give us a weaker light. These facts and plain words express, I think, nearly all the parts of outward creation which force themselves on the notice of us all every day. How did they come there? They were just the same in our fathers' days, and our grandfathers' days, and so on for hundreds and hundreds of years back. A new road may have been cut here, or a new hedge planted there, but in all that is not obviously man's work the changes have not been worth speaking of. But how did they first come into existence at all? The

what happened so very long ago, if there is to join that time on to this. What has God been doing all this long while? We said just now that the creation has remained the same: and that was the way of looking at it, so it is; but in another way of looking at it, it is quite the reverse; the creation never seems to stand still, nor any part of it. Changes are going on in every thing at every moment. Autumn comes after summer, and winter after autumn, and so the seasons go round and round, spring back to summer: no day being yesterday: the leaves of the trees grow and green and fall and rot and new ones come on in the next year; and so it is with everything. This is the work of the Father through Christ. Through all our life long we are always moving among His doings, and we are holding one end of an unbroken chain which starts from the first day of creation.

But there is a worse and more chilling error than that of time. We say that God has been working is the worker of all the works of creation. It is quite possible, nay only too easy, to think of God in such a way that the creation seems no nearer to us for our connecting Him with it. There is a distance in both our better and our worse thoughts about the High and Holy One that puts Him infinitely away from us. But the Gospel brings near to us Him who once was afar off, and with Him all His works. When He in whom the world was

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many signs that the powers which so plainly and wonderfully obeyed Him, had in truth been obeying Him from the time they came into being. It was no new thing for the winds, and the produce of the earth, and men's bodies to be subject to His will and power. He might give them different commands, He might set them upon harder tasks than ever before; but there was nothing new in their obeying His commands and performing the tasks which He set them. But a new knowledge, and yet not altogether new, was brought to man's heart. At the very first God had given man the earth for his dominion to replenish it and subdue it; and yet ever since, men had been trembling and crouching before the powers of the earth. But that first lordship of man was claimed once more for him by the Son of Man, and every miracle which we read in the Gospels is a pledge that we too have not lost the powers which were given us at the beginning.

There are however some important words which we have not noticed yet. "God saw," we were told, "every thing that he had made, and behold it was very *good*": "Christ hath done all things *well*" is the Gospel comment upon His miracles. In the time between these two sayings the fall of man had come to pass. Man, like the rest of God's works was good at the beginning, but sin had meanwhile entered into him and death by sin. The cloud which darkened man's heart often seemed to darken all beside. In some men or other

doth all things well now no less than before he had fallen. His mind and works cannot be comprehended. They are all grounded in goodness and love. He knows of man's fall and all the miseries that have brought on body and spirit far better than we can do. Therefore He came from heaven to become a suffering man Himself. Neither did He feel the pains that have followed from sin as a part of His creation. *He* made ears that they might hear, and tongues that they might speak. His making that poor deaf and dumb man able to hear and speak was a pledge that He the good Maker was still ever at work, undoing the evil done by the enemy, healing every hurt, and perfecting health and goodness the works of His own hands, and that His future acts of healing and redemption should be more wonderful still. The virtue which went forth from His hands to cure those who were afflicted of ear and tongue was but a faint token of the virtue which should hereafter go forth from His cross to heal the more grievous hurts which sin had brought upon men's spirits. But it was a blessed token still to the Evangelist: and it should be to us, brethren, when we know no other way to find help against the evil of our own hearts and the evil that is without us. This we know, that the enemies of man are also the enemies of God. We see but dimly His past triumphs over sin and Satan, how far then must His future triumphs go

IX

SEEKING GOD'S KINGDOM AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

"SEEK ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and these things shall be added unto you."—*Matt.* vi. 33.

IN the verses before the text our Lord has been teaching us not to give ourselves up to anxious distracting thoughts about the food or clothing which we should need to-morrow or at any future time. He has told us that to do that was to follow the bad example of the heathen, who sought after such things because they had no sure ground for believing that they were cared for by any one but themselves. He has assured us that we are not driven to no such dreadful necessity, and therefore ought not to act as if we were. He has reminded us that we know that we have a Father in heaven who knows all our wants and who will supply them in the way which He sees to be best for us; and that so we may trust ourselves to His care while we do our work and thankfully receive the blessing

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miserable anxieties from which Christ is striving to deliver us, whether they be anxieties about to-morrow or about ever so many years hence. We want a something to give our lives a *direction* to point them in some particular way. With an endless choice of things before us which we can do if we please, we want some great rule to help us how to choose, and to make a plain pathway for us when everything seems so tangled and crooked. The text gives Christ's rule. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness."

Let us look at these words carefully. Some of them bring to our minds some still more familiar words of His which occur in this very chapter. "After this manner pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name, *Thy kingdom come.*" We are bidden to seek God's kingdom, and the first and easiest way of seeking it is by prayer; and that prayer Christ Himself puts into our mouths, "*Thy kingdom come.*" These words, just like those of the text, have their difficulty: nay, the difficulty of both is the same. If we can use this part of the Lord's prayer with an understanding heart in speaking to God, we cannot be wholly in the dark as to what God means to say to us.

What then is God's kingdom? We may see a way a little toward answering that question by considering our own kingdom, that kingdom for which we beseech God every time we offer up the prayer for the High Court of Parliament. We are not men

and enforce those laws, the highest of those being the King or, as it is now, the Queen. Some persons may complain that each man's single and liberty is thus shortened; but that is a mistake. All our peace and safety come from the restraint thus placed on wilfulness and the violence to which it leads. This it is which makes us a real people, and not a mere herd of wild animals. The Bible most truly speaks thus of one of the most miserable times in all Jewish history, "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes." For in such a state of things the strongest must prevail: the weakest has little power to resist. It is our laws and government stretching themselves among us in ways which we often forget, that keep our lives and goods in order and allow us to pursue our several callings in peace.

This is what we call a kingdom; and thus we gain a lively idea of God's kingdom. What the Queen and her government is to our English kingdom, that God is to the whole world: only that what is maimed and but half true in her kingdom is entire and entirely true in His. He is Himself the Ruler, respects a true Ruler. He does indeed entrust a portion of power to every one of us, to some more, to some less, to be used for Him: but for all that He does not cease to reign Himself all the while. His power is never idle, but acting at once in all the corners of His kingdom. An earthly king

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one secret chamber of their hearts can they wholly their own. His kingdom also is a kingdom of laws, and his Almighty power can never be put forth against His own laws; and the laws of the Gracious and Holy One must needs be gracious and holy too. All good human laws are faint and partial copies of His. And just as human laws bind members of one people to each other, and compel each man to respect the rights of his fellows, so the laws of God's kingdom bind men to each other by ties of the spirit, not of the body, by love and mutual trust and self-denial and devotion. But their rule is not over our spirits only; they are meant to guide our whole outward life and every work in which a man or any body of men can possibly take part. Wherever there is a right and a wrong, there is a right is a law of God and part of His kingdom, and the wrong is a rebellion against it. Each of us obeys the laws of God's kingdom just so far as he performs the task in life which God has set him.

This, brethren, is the kingdom which Christ bids us seek;—seek first in prayer. Is it not there already with us? Or must we wait for it till it has passed away from the earth? This cannot be. Christ sent His Apostles to preach the good news of the kingdom, and they rejoiced to declare that it was already come. But though it is among us, there is rebellion enough against it. God has given to men the power of choosing between good and evil. There is no compulsion to choose the good if we

day? And yet it is there all the while. And it shews its presence by the suffering which those who disobey it. For God's purpose for His kingdom is to train all men in blessedness, and must set the mark of His anger upon those who break in upon His plans of love for them and their fellow creatures. Whenever we look at our world, and see the marks of men's sin, cruelty, injustice, or insolence, or sluggishness, or inactivity, there God would have us remember that they are only marks of sin, marks of the disobedience against their Creator and Father and Saviour. Every such mark is also a breach of His kingdom. Every such mark is a hindrance to the march of God's armies: it is a thing added to the vast mass of human suffering and wretchedness which has been growing and increasing since the earliest days of man. Any one who has thought or care for the welfare of the world needs pray with all his heart that God's kingdom may come more and more, and that its blessing may be daily better known and better obeyed. And such a one will most surely lament most keenly all his own share in the common rebellion. And when he seeks God's kingdom in prayer, the prayer will be one of deepest self abasement: he will ask not for a change against the everlasting laws, but that he may be able to fulfil them aright, and have strength to fulfil them.

And thus having begun with seeking God's kingdom by prayer he will go on to seek it in

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our dealings with others by the discovery that and they have all some work to do for God, w neither can properly accomplish without the o It is a mighty and surely a most cheering tho that we are fellow workers with every power in e and heaven, and yet it can never puff us up pride.

But we are bidden to seek not only God's k dom, but also His righteousness. For indeed can we ever know and understand the laws of G government ;—much more, how can we ever l in any measure to obey them and help forward observance by others, if we have not God's own righteousness deep within in our own hearts? God's righteousness is itself the very spirit of own kingdom. Christ does not here tell us me to seek *righteousness*, though elsewhere we are bidden ; but to seek *God's* righteousness. righteousness which is of our own making, w we try to gain by standing aloof from Him, is w nothing at all. *His* righteousness does not me mean righteousness *like* His, but His own righteousness. We must receive Himself into hearts, and then His righteousness will spring within us and overflow all our doings.

"Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God and righteousness," says Christ. So far as we can n that the aim of our lives, so far shall we find way straight and plain before our face. The bles of such a rule is this, that we never have far t

winning God's favour : nay, that is rebellion. place in His kingdom is just the common which lies before each of us, whatever that be : righteousness for us is a willingness, a heart's desire, to do that work, though every of evil strive to tempt us away from it. And this is what we seek, then all other things, food and clothing and the rest, will be added. God does not forget what we need : He will leave us unprovided while we are doing His. But we must do it freely and heartily from to Him : the moment we begin to bargain with about our wages, all His righteousness vanishes within us, and we are left to our own weak, helpless selves. And above all let us remember Who spoke these words. It was not God but the Son of God become a poor suffering whose acts as man shew us the true way to all righteousness and the very inward power and glory of God's kingdom. In Him who died for sins, and died to make us righteous with His righteousness, we have something on which hearts can rest, when we are tempted to whether there be indeed a divine kingdom anywhere in the world, and a divine justice ordering all which it contains.

X

THE OLD AND NEW MAN

“THAT ye put away, as concerning your former manner of life, the old man, which waxeth corrupt after the lusts of deceit ; and that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind ; and put on the new man, which after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness and truth.”—*Eph.* iv. 22-24 (R.V.).

EVERY time that we listen to such a passage as this, and there are many such in the Bible, two different thoughts are apt to be running through our minds, and to hinder us from receiving the good that we might from the Apostle's teaching. One thought is that we have heard all that often before : we are too familiar with it, and it has nothing new to teach us. The other thought is that we have been listening to a string of difficult words and phrases which we do not now understand, which probably some explaining could make us really and truly understand, and which after all it does not much matter whether we understand or no. It is quite possible for these two different thoughts to occur to us.

just saying what all those who are common good people say in one shape or another, that it is a good thing to do right and a bad thing to do wrong, and yet, while we are supposing that we may also be whispering to ourselves in the same breath that we had better not trouble ourselves about the wrappings which he threw around the lesson, so easy to understand and agree to, and so easy to obey.

Easy this is, and natural, but it is dangerous. Nothing is more disabling to all inward growth than the habit of expecting to have good things spoken to us and yet expecting to learn from them nothing particular, to receive from them no new light or new power as carries us a step further than we were before. If the words are not clear and transparent, but require some trouble to get at their meaning, that may be all the better, for they may lay firmer hold upon us while we are at pains to understand them than they would if they glided easily into our ears.

The passage from which the text comes is the foundation on which St. Paul builds most of the latter part of this Epistle. It all turns upon the difference between the position of the Ephesians as they were now as Christians, and their position in the old days of their heathenism, or the position of their neighbours who were still heathen. All this sounds as if it were a long way

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the kind of language which he chooses to use to them. He does not merely wish to say "good, abstain from evil." That was a sound lesson enough, but not all that he now had in view, for heathens could understand it as well as they. The best heathens had been saying much and more for many a long year; not without some solid result of their teaching, God thanked, but still on the whole with no sufficient effect. Men were growing worse and worse around, less willing to deny themselves any shameful indulgence, less capable of labouring for the good of others or even of following the guidance of natural affection. A new power was wanted in the world; and such a new power St. Paul believed was given into the hands of himself and of all who confessed the risen and ascended Jesus of Nazareth to be their Lord. For any one who had taken that step the very words 'good' and 'evil' meant infinitely more than they did before. Good and evil were seen to be greater, and farther reaching, and more inward things than any while yet in heathenism had ever dreamed. The new Christians found themselves, whether they would or no, to be standing in the very thick of the battle between good and evil, and found it to be a battle indeed; one in which they had every need to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Their eyes were opened to a host of enemies unseen before, on the

whose servants they were. They could not be mere bystanders. They must fight, fight and without, against the powers of death in their own hearts and the powers of death in the world around them.

St. Paul's first word then is an appeal to the difference of life implied in the very change. 'What is natural and yet deadly for those who have become Christians,' he says in effect, 'is not natural and is still deadlier for you. Let all men see and feel what it is to have a Christian's faith and how it can brighten the darkest life, and enable the weak to defy the strong.'

The heathen state of mind is the state of mind natural to us all till we have learned better. It is a disposition to pamper our greedy selves when we get an opportunity; to look on all around us as made for our own use and enjoyment, to be selfish, or scornful, or false, according as impulse or outward temptation suggests. This evil tendency is always present, ready to break through the better nature which Christian teaching and Christian grace have framed within us, or even the restraint of law and opinion without us. The chief difference between us and the Ephesians is this: no sharp line divides our heathenism from Christianity. They stand side by side in the same heart, and all possible shades are to be found between the worst among us and the

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and without which we are on the way to destroy ourselves. In his day the light and the darkness stood out sharp and clear against each other as they hardly ever do in the misty twilight of our own ordinary ways. We have to see our natural heathenism in all its proper ugliness, and the high calling set before us in Christ our Lord in all its proper pureness and glory; and to understand clearly that the one is bound to trample on and conquer the other. This is what St. Paul enabled us to see: and for this reason his language about the heathen is no matter of idle curiosity: it helps us just where we most want help. It enables us to see instead of guessing.

The verses of the text are written in the same strain. "That ye put away," St. Paul says, "concerning your former manner of life, the old man which waxeth corrupt after the lusts of deceit." Now that they were Christians, they could look back on that old manner of walking, the ordinary Gentile habit of life, and see how different it was from everything high and great. While they had been in the midst of it, it had seemed natural enough, the only rational or even the only possible conduct for men living on earth to pursue. Now they knew better. They were able to look down as from a height upon their former selves, and see what poor grovelling creatures they had been.

But the lesson was not meant to make them scornful and pitiless towards the heathen who

as though their work was done, and all their days were over. Not so. St. Paul desired to warn against what he calls the old man who still hold upon their hearts, and was by no means out altogether yet. Christians though they partakers of a heavenly calling, they had a struggle to carry on within as well as without. Their faith had still a great part of its work in filling their inner selves and their outward lives.

But how were they to know this old man? By his likeness to their old manner of life. If they traced back all the shameful deeds which horrified them, as seen in the heathen, to their source, they would find that they all sprang from the same tempers and dispositions which, alas! had still firm a lodgment within them, and with which they were even now much too content.

But why does St. Paul use this strange phrase 'the old man'? Why does he go beyond the evil passions by their own common names? At least why is he not satisfied with condemning them as sinful, dark, deadly? The reason is that he wished it to be seen that evil is not a thing which lies loosely on the outside of us, always clearly marked in its own character and condemned as soon as seen. He wishes us to know that all evil has its root in us, that which wears the appearance of being merely a matter of course. 'The old man' is a man in us which we have left just as we found it in us which still remains not corrected, not

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of the old man in us ; we do not want any one to teach them to us, they spring up rankly enough like free weeds of our soil. The verses that follow point out what some of these promptings of the old man are ; to lie, to be wilfully angry, to slander, to steal instead of working, to speak out any foul or malicious word that rises to our tongue,—here are some of the most obvious signs that the old man is still strong.

Strong, and yet only with a treacherous and failing strength. He is corrupt according to the lusts or desires of deceit says St. Paul. There is nothing lasting about any of his works. Even the seeming good is nothing but the enjoyment of the moment. When that is over, no fruit, nothing good remains behind ; nothing but a fresh corruption, a fresh spot of rottenness burrowing in the soil. Something out of our life is gone, we can do less, hope less, believe less, nay enjoy less. The life of the old man appears so sensible, so rational, so fit for people who have no ambition to be better than their neighbours, as they call it. But in truth it is all a huge imposture. It rests on nothing but desires, single, separate, warring desires, desires full of deceit as St. Paul calls them, promising much and performing so little.

If you read this part of the Epistle with any care you will see how anxious St. Paul is to make us observe this deceitfulness and emptiness in the desires which belong to the old man within us. He tells

them that estranges them from the life of God, the *blindness* or *dullness* of their heart, of their turning themselves up to filthiness, not as some would have it, because they had so much feeling, but through being *past feeling*. Perseverance in the natural, less practise of easy evil, is anything but a mark of superior wisdom : it does not shew any real acquaintance with the world of fact and the value of anything as compared with another. It is just the lazy, obvious view of things which comes to the body without trouble, till he takes the needful pains to see, and know, and learn, and be wise.

The old man then is to be put away, shaken off of us as a garment which is now found to be worthless and full of corruption. But are we to remain a mere emptiness, a dull, virtuous man, from which all play and freedom of life is taken? Not so taught St. Paul. The old and corrupt is cast out only to make way for the fresh and new. The renewal has to begin in the spirit of our mind, not first in our words or actions, for by them we might be correct enough and yet dead in our *mind* ; nay, not merely there, in that dull and stirring world of various thoughts and feelings which is shut up in the breast of each one of us, but in the *spirit* of our mind ; in the moving principle which governs all our aims and longings, and the main current of our hearts in this direction. That. There is a new man for us to put on. To wish to know its mark, let us think of God's

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New it is for us, but it is not now first to be devised by our own labour and skill. The new man was long ago created by God: it was the very man which God made after His own image and pronounced good. It lies within us all from the beginning, hidden and hampered by our corruption but not destroyed by it, only waiting to be drawn out into light and power by Christian nurture and our own earnest endeavours, and God's blessed Spirit quickening all. It is in a true and important sense more natural than the nature of the old man. It was created after righteousness and holiness belonging to the truth. These two words 'righteousness' and 'holiness' sum up its leading character; just and loving dealings towards men, purity and reverence towards the holy God. And as the old man breathes deceit and was always being deceived, so the new man breathes truth and beholds truth. The more entirely we live the life of the new man which God created, the more exactly shall we find it fitting into the world which is also of His creation as a key fits into a lock. Every increase in knowledge and wisdom, every advance in the power of seeing men and things as they really are, is akin to the new man and helps to build him up: the truth and the life are always near each other.

But the foundation of all truth and all life is ours already, brethren. We have but to build on that which God has given us once for all. The truth

ways of the Gentiles) "if so be that ye know Him and were taught in Him." He is the lesson to be learned: to have Him formed in our hearts, to learn it well. To learn Him enables us, not only all, to learn *God*, and know rightly the character and mind of Him who holds us in the palm of His hand. To learn Him, Christ, enables us, so to learn *man*, to discover our own true nature, the true order which regulates our dealings with one another and the one right and blessed and sufficient life for us and them. He who came down from heaven to do His Father's will and finish His mission and stablish His kingdom, He who bore our grief and carried their sorrows, whose joy was not to be ministered unto but to minister, who freely poured out His life for the sake of another, lastly, whom for this cause God highly exalted, gave Him the name that is above every name, to be to all who believe in Him much more than a voice speaking true words, more than a mere example for them to copy. He must be a living power within them, moulding them into His own likeness, building up a new eternal nature, which yet was itself the original nature from the beginning. As such a nature grows and gains strength, the petty vanities and enjoyments of self shrink to their proper nothingness, and becomes more and more the one desire to overcome our powers and weaknesses, all successes and

XI

THE KEEPING UNDER OF THE BODY

“I KEEP under my body, and bring it into subjection ; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be castaway.”—1 *Cor.* ix. 27.

THE Collect for to-day takes its stand on the fact that Christ for our sake fasted forty days and forty nights. This, we know, was in preparation for the Temptation, that series of trials which the evil one made to beguile Him into distrusting His Heavenly Father, and striking out a path of His own. It was further done in accordance with the fasts and similitudes of forty days in the wilderness by which His two great typical predecessors, Moses and Elijah, had been prepared and strengthened for the great religious missions to which they had been divinely appointed. The prayer of the Collect, for ourselves and for all to whom the words carry any meaning, founded upon that act of the Lord's, is this, the

those things which either by light suggestions or strong urgencies He moves us to do.

In this prayer the leading word is 'abstain'. On that the meaning of the whole Collect depends. In some sense or other the Collect before us the duty of abstaining from something which we might naturally hold and use: in other words, of *not* doing or not enjoying something which we should otherwise do or enjoy as a matter of course. It is tolerably plain that something more than abstinence from *sin* is meant. Yet the Collect does not say in express words what it is from which we pray to be enabled to abstain: that it leaves to our conscience to discover, when we have considered why we should desire to abstain from anything. Nevertheless the Collect uses a caution which should not be overlooked. It does not simply ask God to enable us to practise abstinence generally; but to give us such abstinence as may help us to obey Him. It says nothing which would lead us to think that abstinence is a good thing by itself and for its own sake. Rather it suggests to us that there is no such thing as an abstinence which is not good. The Church had only too much reason for this. We see from the Gospels and Epistles how weakly we use the Pharisees made of various abstinences, imposing them as practices in themselves pleasing to God without regard to their effect upon men's souls. And by degrees the same perverse spirit grew

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lowered standard of goodness. No one could upon it, who had any true knowledge of God's mind and will and of the deeds in which God delights.

But we have no right to take credit to ourselves because we seem to have outgrown that particular wrong way of seeking God's favour. The same spirit of formalism and unreal belief has taken all our hearts, perhaps the hearts of those most who most glory in having escaped it and take delight in accusing others of giving way to it. *We* also are only too willing to believe that we can please God in any way rather than by bringing forth the fruits of the Holy Spirit in our lives. If we do not practise abstinences as means of buying God's favour, the reason often is because we are lukewarm about obtaining His favour at all, or because we think we can buy it cheaper in other ways, not because our faith is pure, or because we feel strongly that God's grace is given, not sold. In any case, the Colossians does in effect warn us against supposing that there is any particular virtue in abstinence by itself.

What then *is* the right use of abstinence? It is that "our flesh being subdued to the Spirit, we may ever obey the Lord's godly motions in righteousness and holiness to His honour and glory." This is the one only true end to be kept in view. In so far as we live after the flesh, as the Bible calls it, (and this phrase describes only too well a large part of our manner of living) we dull and harden our hearts and raise a thick cloud to hide the light of God and

it harder to lift up our dulled hearts to the throne of grace: we give way more easily to known vices; we cease to be anxious about doing right: even our common natural affections grow colder: we become hard and ungracious to those whom we are bound by the most holy ties to love; and on the other hand we become more and more bent on our own pleasure, or comfort, or some other end which belongs only to self. Thus the deadly poison, which begins with the body having too much of its own way, steals at last over our whole selves, and estranges us from God and from our fellow creatures, and makes us fit for worse things when temptation comes.

Such is the evil: how is it to be most effectually met? Surely by noting how it begins, and by opposing it *there*. Now as it begins with self-love, so also must it be resisted by means of self-constraint or, what is the same thing, by abstinence. It is not enough merely to strive to abstain from evil and to do good; or rather we shall make no sort of attempt at this, if we never abstain from our own free will from anything which is *not* evil. We have a difficulty in taking this thought in, from its being so strange to our common way of thinking and acting. We are indeed all familiar with the fact that many commit gross breaches of the commandments of God and man: and we are all in words condemn such things as wrong.

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character, yet sinful in God's sight : we are all ready to confess that. What we are not familiar with and are not ready to confess or condemn is the equally common and certain fact that we are satisfied with keeping at best along the *edge* of right and wrong. At best we take all we can get of pleasure and advantage which is not positively sinful. Perhaps we want not to sin ; but we want very much more to enjoy ourselves as much as we can : we go as near to sinning as we dare without quite crossing the border.

What does that matter, some one may ask, there is no harm in enjoyment so long as it is far from sin? It matters much, because we have not only the present moment to think of but the lasting effect on our character. We have no right to treat ourselves as though we had no power and duty to look before and after. We know that hours of temptation *must* be in store for us, and we are bound to strengthen ourselves now, that we may be ready to meet them when they come. With the poor chance we have of resisting temptation, we have never practised ourselves beforehand in putting restraint upon our lower selves! If we cared about *succeeding* in resisting temptation, we should not think it a hardship to stint ourselves somewhat in our lawful freedom in the easy times when temptation is yet distant, or *seems* yet distant, remembering how helpful such stint is in building up a firm and stable character. If

early in denying ourselves some of our indulgences. So only can we be sure that the hour of trial comes, and perhaps comes such that there will be no parleying, but the flesh will instantly know its master and obey. Yet alas, be our temptations as good as they may, we all find it too hard to be wise betimes. The soft and loose easy way is always popular. No one finds fault with it. It seems to do nobody any harm. Nothing strong or great ever yet came out of it. It does well enough for play, but it makes a bad work of fighting when the hour of battle arrives.

Now supposing that some few among us come to feel the truth of all this and wish to do upon it, but ask how they are to begin, there is no single ready-made commandment. To abstain from our own free will from using to the full all the enjoyments, this is the one rule to be kept in mind. *how* this is best to be done, each conscience must decide for itself. There is no virtue in one rule more than another. Only, as the appetites of the body have so large a part in the evil of our nature, there is seldom any discipline so useful as that which makes *them* feel that they must and should be servants and not masters.

Once more, if the question is asked, at what point the restraint should be practised, again the answer must depend on the needs of each single person. When temptation be seen coming from afar, a wise Christian

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times. But all experience proves the additional helpfulness of a stricter control exercised at special times, and, if there be no good reason to the contrary, it is well to accept the times marked out for us by a sacred authority, such as the season on which we have entered. So we shall be helped by the knowledge that our struggle is not being carried on alone. Thousands and thousands of Christian men will be labouring along with us for the same end. Now too we are in the season of the Lord's own fasting in the wilderness and can strengthen ourselves with that recollection. If any proud and stupid thoughts arise of glorying in what we are doing, let us look a little onwards to Good Friday and think of His Cross and Passion, praying earnestly that ourselves and all our own perils and strivings may be washed in the blood of His perfect sacrifice and then at Easter-tide rise again to the new and joyful life of Him who has ransomed us from all unrighteousness, and death the fruit of evil.

High sounding excuses may easily be made, not only for repudiating any such attempt at deliberate self-constraint, but even for speaking evil of such as attempt to use it. In place of argument it is enough to read the text over two or three times, and consider what it must and does mean. Even without the text no man could suppose the Apostle St. Paul to have been satisfied with just not being a glutton, or just not being a drunkard, or just not committing acts of uncleanness. But in the text he goes far beyond this. "I keep under my body," he says, "and bring it into

(for so we may best paraphrase St. Paul's concluding phrase). "Keep under my body and bring it into subjection": what words are these? And observe the clear and decided purpose in so doing. Not "that I may please God by doing what is unpleasant to myself": he worshipped no such God as that. Not "in spite of my body as an evil thing": he believed his body was made good by God, and redeemed to good by Christ: he himself says that no man ever hated his own flesh. But "lest I should when I shall be found wanting." After all those years of deep and active Christian life of which to-day's epistle reminds us, he was afraid that his body might bring him into *that*, if he did not keep it strictly in order. If we have no such fears about ourselves, what is the reason? Is it that we are better men than he was? or is it that we know more about human character and the nature by which it is built up?

Was his life then a dull, sour, joyless life? Few cares and sorrows it was: few lives of any worth or nobleness escape that lot as time goes on. But to him each care and sorrow was lost in a brighter joy and a keener joy. In that epistle for to-day he describes himself as serving God in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings. But he reminds us of these things only to shew how they seem to him. "Sorrowful," he says, "yet always rejoicing, having nothing and yet possessing all things."

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to a living Lord, whose ministry on earth and whose death of martyrdom lay behind him as a pattern to follow, and whose risen glory in the heavens shone ever before him as a source of undying hope for the world. Without the knowledge of that Lord, our Lord and ours, the subduing of the flesh to the spirit is no doubt a somewhat dreary task. But if we lighten the moment we can take as our great aim to be free and unencumbered so as to obey His good movings, and can look back to His fasting and temptation in the wilderness as a battle and a victory in which *we* have a share.

XII

THE CRUCIFIXION OF THE FLESH

“THEY that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.”—*Gal.* v. 24.

I SPOKE last Sunday of the different clogs and hindrances which we all feel when we try to live a better life, and endeavour, as the previous collection said, to obey the Lord’s godly motions in righteousness and true holiness. I said that we ought not to be content with merely talking in a loose manner of these hindrances, if we are in earnest in wishing to get them out of our way, but that we ought to try to understand more exactly what they are. For this purpose I said that we cannot do better than use the account which first our baptismal service and our catechism give us of the matter. At baptism we renounced or cast off the world, the flesh, and the devil as powers with which we wish to have nothing to do, and refused to allow that we in

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came members, that we might have power and strength to have victory and to triumph against them, against the devil, the world, and the flesh. These three things then contain every possible hindrance that may keep us from becoming better men. Whatever we have to fight against may be reckoned under one or other of these heads.

Last week I explained to you the meaning which the world can be called a hindrance to, whether we mean by it the outward world of earth and sky in which we have our dwelling, or the world of men around us to whom we are related by various ties and who act upon us and move ourselves and our doings in many different ways. I put before you the danger to which we are exposed from the world in the strongest possible language, the language of St. John, who declares that if any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. I shewed you that St. John could not mean that we were to hate either the earth which God made and called very good, or any of the men who are of the same flesh and blood as ourselves: since God loves both, and has redeemed both with the blood of His dear Son, and therefore would wish us to love both also. But when we love them in such a way as to forget that we have received them from Him as our Father, when we suffer either their delightfulness or their terror to estrange our hearts from Him, then they become a curse to us: they give us a distan-

To-day I wish to speak of the second hindrance to the flesh. It is not by any means the first time I have mentioned this subject. No longer ago than a fortnight since I dwelt on the keeping under of the flesh and subduing it to the service of the spirit as the great business of Lent. But there is still to be said. We shall understand better in this way the flesh can ever become an enemy to the spirit, looking at it along with our other enemies, the world and the devil. We must not fix our thoughts and our care upon one only of them, or we shall become an easy prey to the others. Each may indeed overcome us to the others, as I shewed you how often the rebelliousness of the body leads to sin of all kinds; but still each has its own dangers which must be well understood, if they are to be guarded against with good effect.

As then St. John taught us to stand free from the entanglements of the world when it would ensnare us from the Father, so in my text St. Paul teaches us to keep the mastery over the flesh and refuse to follow its will instead of the spirit's will. St. John said that the love of the world and the love of the Father could not go together; but he did not say that any one who loved the world had no right to believe that God was his Father. Even in his estrangement he must be a son still, though an unworthy and rebellious son. It is just the same here. St. Paul bids us walk in the Spirit, but

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Let us look more closely at the verses and their exact meaning. "They that are Christ's," Paul says, "have crucified the flesh with the affections," *i.e.* with its passions, "and lusts." First, might ask who are meant by those words, "they that are Christ's." Do they mean "those who truly love and follow Christ," leaving out those who have known about Him and who profess to believe in Him, but who live unchristian and sinful lives? That we might not unnaturally take to be the meaning of the words at first sight; not unnatural, I say, but for all that, not rightly. It would be a fearful thing to say that none belong to Christ except those who live after Christ's pattern. If that were so, we never could turn from sin and forgetfulness to Christ with faith and confidence as *our* Lord and God; we should not know whether He were already *our* Lord and God, or whether (strangest of fancies) we had to make Him so by our own doing. In any case the rest of the verse fixes with certainty the meaning of this beginning. "They that are Christ's," he says, "*have* crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts": not "*they do* crucify" or "*they will* crucify," but they *have*, have already, crucified the flesh. How and at what time then did they crucify the flesh? How and at what time did they come to be Christ's? An earlier verse of this same epistle hints the answer; "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ."

as a token of his being admitted among the members of Christ or not? If he has, then he belongs to Christ. His baptism was given him, and he may know that he does. The whole matter is set out still more plainly in Rom. vi. St. Paul asks, whether, since man's sin calls forth God's overflowing and abounding grace and mercy—whether we go on sinning that God's grace and mercy may flow and abound still more? The thought is a fearful one to him, "God forbid," he says, "How can we, who are dead to sin, live any longer therein? You see, he boldly takes for granted that we are already dead to sin: he allows that men already dead to sin could still live in sin, nay, could wilfully and on calculation choose to live in sin. But what does he mean by being dead to sin, and *when* did they die to sin? The next verse tells us, "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him by baptism into death; that, as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." And a little further on: "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let us not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal body, to the end that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." I have read you these verses from the Epistle to the Romans, difficult as they are, because they leave no doubt

can that these blessings, which he calls in our own epistle putting on Christ or becoming Christ's, are given to us in and by our baptism; so that everyone who has been baptized has a right to know and believe that these blessings belong to *him*, and that his sin consists in not using them. But we learn something more than this. We are taught more plainly what is meant by putting on Christ. It is being so joined to Him that all His doings become as ours also. Since we were baptized into Him and His name, we were baptized into His death. We became in baptism partakers not of this or that thing only in Him, but of all that He did and suffered; most of all, of that crowning act and suffering which we call His death. But He was not left in death nor are we. His death was the beginning of a newer and better life; and this also is meant for us: we draw from it the power of walking in newness of life.

But we must go back to what is said about being baptized into Christ's death, for that is what chiefly concerns us to-day. You cannot possibly have listened with any attention to the text which I read out without noticing the strangeness of those words "have *crucified* the flesh." I have been trying to shew you that we may take to ourselves the words which come just before "They that are Christ's": but how can we, you and I in this church, I mean, be said to have

not be fair dealing with the Apostle; and if we were, we should be no better off for a while. How many of us are there who can honestly say that they have restrained or afflicted the flesh from its passions and lusts? Have we not rather indulged and perverted it, and let it follow its own inclinations only too often? The word 'crucifixion' must then without doubt refer to our Lord's death on the cross. In the same chapter of the Romans which I have already quoted we read "knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." When therefore Christ was put to death on the cross, read in the Gospels, His body was not the only thing crucified. Our old man, which is the body of sin, or in other words our flesh, was crucified with Him. That was done once for all, for this or that man only, but for the whole of man whose flesh Christ took. It was done for I say, for every man, and every man has to claim it to the benefit. He has only to claim it in the right way, and that right way is baptism. When we are baptized in infancy, others claim it for us; they promise in our name that the cross shall be our chosen badge and ask for our abasement in self and exalting in Christ. This is the glory of Christian men. When baptized in later years, as most of those

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about our flesh being crucified with Christ may all convey no real meaning to your minds. I use no phrase of my own inventing; it comes straight out of the Bible: but we all know only too well how much of the language of the Bible is already a dead letter to us, carrying no more meaning to our understandings than we should get from reading a book in an unknown tongue. I am not saying that this is our fault: no doubt it is in some respects our faults, partly because we do not take so much pains as we ought to understand what we *might* understand, and partly because many of the dark sayings in the Bible become plain only to holiness and simpleness of heart. But, as I said, I am not now accusing or confessing: I speak of the difficulties which we find in understanding the Bible, which do *not* come from our fault, but from the hardness of much of the Bible itself. Now this is Lent, when it is my duty even more than at other times to examine you and myself of the very plain unmistakable sins of our lives, which everybody can understand. To-day I have to speak about the flesh, and shall do so before writing my text. St. Paul had said that the works of the flesh are manifest or plain; that they are these, "Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, quarrelling, jealousy, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings,"

next, that they who do such things shall inherit the kingdom of God. This is plain teaching, such as we all of us want. But I am sure we want also much of the other teaching which is not plain but difficult, and that the one will not do us much good without the other. A man or woman given to drunkenness or to still more beastly conduct needs to be told that the kingdom of God is for ever against such things and against those who do them; but his or her best chance of reaching a purer life is the knowledge that the flesh which drags them down into these evil deeds was long ago slain with Christ on the cross, and that their baptism in Christ's blood has given them a right to believe that they are still God's dear children and under the influence of God's Holy Spirit.

What do we mean then by saying that our flesh with its affections and lusts was crucified with Christ or that we at our baptism received such a crucifixion of it? Let us consider what it was in Christ Himself that was crucified. When He was born He took with Him from His mother's womb the nature and blood of men. He had to eat and drink as we have in order to support life. We read of His hunger, His tears, His agony and bloody sweat. Whatever bodily craving there is in us, there was in Him: there was but this difference that He had the complete mastery over His own body, and

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spirit. It was when He was hungry in the wilderness that the devil tempted Him to command s to become bread for His own food. But He s firm, and suffered not His flesh to prevail. It the same through His whole life. The flesh te us to make ourselves comfortable and easy. He went about a hard laborious life doing good. He comfort He gave up, and chose a life in which had not where to lay His head, that He might be able to work at preaching the good news, healing the sick, and casting out devils, while it was yet because that was the work which His Father given Him to do. Not a single act of obedience and love could He perform without putting pressure upon the flesh which would rather have chosen to please itself. So it was all His life long: it was all one long giving up of His own comfort, His own pleasure, His own will. And this reached its crowning height in His death. He did not *seek* death. He uttered no word that would merely vex His enemies; He went His own quiet way, escaping from them as we see from St. John, when He could do so lawfully, but walking steadily through darkness and pain to death, when He could not escape except by leaving His appointed place. "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened He not His mouth." This was the last and greatest trial, yielding up His flesh when and only when

the flesh behind, hanging there a mere dead weight. And now, brethren, let us remember that that which hung there dead, was our flesh. His mother, like our mothers, had Adam and Eve for her parents. The flesh which He so completely made subject to the spirit is the same flesh which we have to keep subject to the spirit. Henceforth we know that one of our race has done perfectly what which God requires of us to do. That nailed and pierced body is an everlasting sign that the flesh may be kept under, in its proper place and doing its proper work, for it has once been so kept. And He who did it is our Life and our Strength. The task, which seemed hopeless till He accomplished it, and which always was and must always remain hopeless for those who attempt it in their own strength, may be undertaken cheerfully and bravely by all who will sink themselves in Him. We ask only to be allowed to share in the victory of His Cross, and therefore who are willing to follow in His steps. This *is* the glory and blessing which we claim for our children and ourselves; there is no other: because the Cross is the sign of an accomplished salvation, we are not therefore to be sober and drink, and be merry in season and out of season; in other words, to please ourselves and give our flesh full play. The mark that is set on our heads is the sign of a *crucified* King: let us understand well what makes it such a source of hope.

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death, even the death of the cross. The body of the soldiers is the same as that of their King; they too have a flesh to conquer as well as a will and a devil; and therefore they must be willing to deny themselves as He did.

One thing more I must say to prevent possible mistake, though I have said it often before. The body is not in itself our enemy. To think so is not merely frantic folly but blasphemy. The body is a most precious possession given us by God, the most blessed help-mate for the spirit. Every strength and power which the body enjoys is holy and divine, but it is holy and divine only in its proper place, as servant and not as master. It is not that we dishonour the body too much. We honour it far too little. Giving way without stint to its greedy desires is not honouring it: how can there be honouring that which brings it into a state from which we would rather fly away in contempt and disgust? Then only do we begin to honour it indeed, when we learn to thank God for the manifold blessings which we enjoy through its means, and pray daily that He will keep it pure, all that is within us under the guidance of His Holy Spirit, which is the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

XIII

THE SACRIFICE OF CONTRITION

“THE sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit : a broken and a heart, O God, shalt thou not despise.”—*Psalm li. 17.*

EVERY time that we meet in church for the worship of God, our voices have to take a Lenten tone. When they rise to their song of rejoicing in the Lord, it is the strength of our salvation. Either these or other sentences read out of the Bible are meant to stir us on confessing our sins. We are following their lead when we fall on our knees before our Almighty Father, and pray Him to have mercy upon us, who have erred and strayed from his path like lost sheep. Thus even our Christmas and Easter services begin with words which are in the strictest sense words of Lent.

But this is not the whole truth. The Church does not banish every recollection of Christmas and Easter from the proper services of Lent. Even

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The lesson which is thus taught us by our prayer book it would be very unwise to forget when we to bring our hearts into a right temper for this season. Lent will do us only harm if it makes us think that there is *any* time in which we ought *not* to humble ourselves before God and implore His mercy for our sins. And Lent will do us still more harm instead of good, if it hides from us the blessed truth that we are all of us not only sinners but redeemed sinners.

There must however be a great many in this assembly every congregation with whom the danger lies rather in another direction. To think wrongly about Lent is not nearly so common a thing as not to think about it at all. Perhaps you do not think it matters much whether you think about it or not. You do not see why you should trouble yourselves about a season which requires an effort to remember at all, a season which seems to bring to men whose lives are cheerless already no dream of relief but rather an increase of gloom, and to bring a cloud on those who prefer nothing but sunshine. Certainly Lent is *itself* of no use at all to any one. If we feel the burden of our own wrong-doing, no longing to be free from that burden, Lent can be only a mockery to us. So long as Lent itself is felt as a burden, so long it is worse than useless. Its use is as a help to get rid of the real burden, the plague of not being able to do the good that we would, and the recollection of what we have done amiss already.

This fifty-first Psalm was written, as almost every verse shews, by one who did feel most sore weight of his offences against his God, and who but lately committed some most grievous sin. It is said to have been written by King David after his double crime of which I spoke last Sunday—his adultery with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, and his murder of Uriah himself. The prophet Nathan awoke his slumbering conscience, and now he felt shamefully he had broken God's holy commandment and brought himself under God's just angelic cloud seemed to come between him and God. He was not a man who could remain quiet and content when once he had so found out how he really stood. That was a dreadful sleep which had fallen upon his better self, when he had been guilty of those shameful crimes. Now he was awake. He could not once put himself to sleep again, if he would. His thought of his sin remained firm and fixed in his mind. It was of no use to say that it was past and gone. He knew too well that it was not past and gone. It haunted him day and night, and he could not get rid of it. It was henceforth part of his life. David the Psalmist and King, the man after his own heart, had committed a base crime against God and man: he could not unmake his own misdeed and handiwork. That which he had done was done for ever. The disgraceful brand upon his soul was there. Perhaps others might forget it in

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and flattering captains, who would try to make that what he had done was no such great matter and that a king need not be too particular about what he did. David himself knew better. . . could not help seeing the dark spot upon his own soul whatever others might say : he was a disgraced man in his own eyes. And, if in his own eyes, how much more in God's eyes ! No mortal man could know him a tenth part so well as he knew himself ; what was his knowledge to God's knowledge ? God the searcher of the heart and reins, was looking him through and through. Turn how and where he would, that calm unchanging eye was ever upon him reminding him that he had not only disgraced himself but offended God. He felt the wrath of God abiding on him. How could he turn away from the wrath of God and become once more, if not happy at least no longer haunted by the shadow of his crime ? God was angry. What would make God lay aside His anger ?

One way seemed open, appointed by God Himself. Moses, in giving laws to the people of Israel, had ordered various sacrifices both for sin and for merely outward defilements. Various criminals were to be put to death in the temple and offerings before the Lord on the altar, and God, it was said, would accept the offering, and receive back the offender into favour and holiness. David, no doubt, had offered many such sacrifices. Perhaps he had

bring him what he really wanted. This the shews very plainly : "Thou desirest no sacrifice would I give it thee ; but thou delightest burnt offerings." The burnt offerings were offered by God's command, and yet they might fail to bring peace to him who offered them. And the reason was not difficult to find. David had only himself what after all it was that God wanted. Surely the sacrifices in *themselves* could give no pleasure. What kind of a God could He be who could enjoy the sight of slaughtered bullocks and the pouring out of their blood ? That was not the God of Israel. And, supposing He could be delighted in such a gift, how would He be able to receive it ? How could any one look up to Him as the righteous Lord believe that he could be bribed out of His righteousness. Millions of men have believed that He can, heathens and Jews, and Christians : perhaps I ought to say we all have sometimes believed that He can. David thought so a few days before, the thought is gone now. His older and truer notion of God must come back. He *knew* that God cannot be bribed by sacrifices or by anything else. He knew that as long as he treated God in that foolish and shortsighted way, as if He were a weak, corrupt, tyrannical ruler, the wrath of God must abide upon him still.

Was there then no hope ? Why had God

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self-abasement David found out the secret which God had laid up for them who should truly seek. It was not the gift that God desired, but the giver; not the sacrifice, but him who offered the sacrifice. The sacrifice itself He valued only as a sign; a sign of many things, but first and foremost a sign that the giver yielded up himself and all that belonged to him to God. David found that God did not covet any of his *possessions*, but his very heart. He had wandered away from his love and obedience to God, and God only longed to bring him back. "Thou desirest no sacrifice; else would I give it thee; but thou delightest not in burnt offerings. The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt thou not despise. A troubled spirit then was the sacrifice of God, the sacrifice which God desired, and which He would accept.

But here too there is danger of mistake. If we fancy that God has any pleasure in our trouble, we do His character a grievous wrong in another way. He who desireth not the death of a sinner cannot desire the misery of a sinner: if He sends misery upon any, it is that so He may deliver them from the deadliest of miseries, the worst of deaths. And, He cannot wish us to be in misery, so neither can He have any pleasure in our making ourselves miserable. It is bad enough to worship a God who feasts on the blood of beasts, but far worse to w

make up and, as it were, pay for the sins which we have committed is of the least worth in God's eyes. We cannot come before Him in any way that will please Him so long as such a deceitful process is poisoning our efforts. But when that is cast away we may feel a true sorrow *because* of our sins: we may have some portion of an anger against ourselves such as God's anger; not fretful and violent, but quiet and full of grief. For though the way is open to return to God, and we have but to turn and go to our Father and He will receive us with joy, still such a return cannot but be attended with inward trouble to ourselves. The thing we are seeking is not a mere breaking of a rule or trampling down of a fence, but it is coldness and unbelief and rebellion against a most loving and most gracious King. How then can we come back to His presence without shame and bitterness, even though we know that the fulness of joy is before us?

I have spoken to-day chiefly of David, and of his thoughts and words after he had committed a particular shocking crime. But that does not make the teaching of the psalm less true of all of us at times of our lives. David himself in most of his other psalms speaks in a happier and lighter tone. And we too are not called upon to make the first psalm the pattern of all our worship: if we should soon turn all our worship into hypocrisy. But yet we go on adding sin to sin day by day.

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time be in a right state, when we cannot sincerely repeat David's words, A broken and a contrite, thou art, O God, shalt not despise. Here we have the description of the mind which David must have wished always to have, only coloured by the depth of his present abasement. The feeling of being at a distance from God and under the wrath of God had thoroughly broken and crushed him, and thereby prepared him for being once more reconciled to God. Such a breaking and crushing could hardly come except from a great and overwhelming blow such a blow as he might perhaps expect never again to feel during his life. But yet to have grown altogether out of the broken and contrite state would have been to undo the good work within him which had been done already : it would have been a growth not to freedom and joy, but to hardness and stubbornness. God, who rejected the burnt offerings of those whose repentance for sin meant only a dread of punishment, would not, he was sure, despise the offering of his inmost spirit beaten down and bruised with the weight of its own guilt. That was the sacrifice with which God would be well pleased not. But it could not be offered once and then neglected its *present* offering, if sincere at all, could be only the pledge of a *lifelong* offering : to give himself up to God meant to take God as the Ruler of all his life.

And this also is the sacrifice which God asks of his dear brethren. Our sacrifice, like David's, must

unusually heinous sin. But what shall we say of daily sins of our ordinary lives? Do we not run the risk of turning our weekly confession of the church into a barren form? Surely it is well if every year should have one season set apart in which we are specially called upon to sorrow before God for all the sins to which we are so much accustomed that we take little count of them. In this way the power of David's repentance may enter into the work of *every* Sunday, without overclouding its righteousness. In our Lenten confession we have something unknown to David. We have less excuse than he had for thinking that we can persuade God to forgive us by anything that we can do. The one sacrifice on Calvary has set us free. Our sacrifices, even as David's, have no virtue apart from that which there accepted the only offering in which He perfectly delight, the offering of a perfectly free and willing heart, even the heart of His dearly loved Son. When we are enabled by His eternal Spirit to lay down ourselves bruised and broken before Him, then He raises us up again in Christ, and makes us hear of joy and gladness, that the bones which He has broken may rejoice: and thus His sorrow is turned our sorrow into the root of a joy which cannot be taketh from us.

XIV

THE MANNER OF GOD'S GUIDANCE

"I WILL inform thee and teach thee in the way wherein thou shalt go, and I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not like to horse and mule, which have no understanding, whose mouths must be held with bit and bridle, lest they fall upon thee."—*Psalm xxxii.* 9, 10.

IN the Collect for to-day we are led to thank God for two great blessings at once, and to ask that they may be continued to us evermore. These two blessings are help and government. O Lord, we pray, who never failest to help and govern them whom Thou dost bring up in Thy steadfast faith and love. The same two blessings are coupled together in other prayers of the Church, and assuredly not by accident. There is a close connexion between the two, and it cannot often be well to desire the one without desiring the other also.

Among the benefits which we receive from our fellow-men these two stand out in a strong light, though it cannot be said that one is the condition of the other.

beholden to any creature but themselves will rather lose what they would like to have than possess along with it the feeling that they are giving enjoyment to some one else. This is a very common feeling, closely connected with some of the characteristics of a strong and great nature. There is good reason for the contempt felt by most of us for those who are perfectly helpless in themselves and who are willing to be commanded backwards and forwards without any will of their own by other people. Provided only they are supplied with what they need by those whom they are thus content to obey, it is most true that without self-help and self-reliance no one can grow up into the full stature of their character. Not merely are they made to be imposed on by others: their own goodness, if they have any goodness, is of a poorer and more dependent sort.

Yet there is another side to the picture. As we have often told you, we are so made that we cannot live by each other's help. We are not made to be wholly alone. It is not for nothing that we are set in families and neighbourhoods. If we are never willing to receive help from others or to give help to others, we grow up with a hard and selfish disposition, which must always remain a hindrance to the best happiness of life, as well as to the best goodness of life. But we must go farther still. We must not only be willing to receive help

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it is most surely true. Any government which deserves the name is in fact the very best kind of help. It is the gift of better knowledge and better power than our own. In one light government or guidance is just that sort of help which least interferes with our own independence: its work is to shew us how we may find help for ourselves. Looked at in another light it is an undeniable blessing. Wherever we are ignorant or dull or inexperienced or heedless, there it is wise to be taken by the hand and led in the way that is best for us. A wise and friendly governor or guide will indeed keep in mind that he ought always to be leading us to walk alone: but for the time being and in some things all through life, the worst calamity that can befall us is to have no one wiser and stronger than ourselves to whom we can look up.

If this be true about the help and guidance received from men, how much more about the help which we receive from God. And here it is even more necessary to keep the two blessings together. To wish or ask for God's help without His government shews a total misunderstanding of the position in which we stand towards Him: just as to think of Him as our governor without thinking of Him as our helper betrays a sad ignorance of His love and zeal for our welfare which inspires all His doings. No, brethren, God our Saviour and our server is also the Lord our Governor. When either

in the right way. So when we pray that our souls and bodies may be rightly governed, we ask that they may be kept safe and whole and unblemished. And when we pray that our hearts and bodies be *preserved*, we ask that they may not be lost to themselves but guided into doing God's will concerning them.

Now if you want to know more about this kind of governing for man, and to satisfy all doubts that may arise as to the good of being governed, the thirty-second Psalm from which I took my text will give you the answer. This Psalm we hear neither man only speaking nor God only speaking to man, but both man asking and then God promising. These verses speak of the comfort and peace of one who has found out his own exceeding sinfulness but found out also God's yet more exceeding forgiveness, "Blessed is he whose unrighteousness is forgiven, and whose sin is covered." In this respect they are specially well fitted for the use of us Christians. We know that though we have sinned in childhood and youth and manhood we have not grievously offended our Heavenly Father, yet we have received the one baptism for the remission of sins which reminds us that we are children of a loving Father. And lest we should forget the truth, Sunday by Sunday our Father's pardon for Christ's sake is freely proclaimed.

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would only cause a worse thing to happen to but a hearty desire to give ourselves up into hands of our merciful Lord, that He may do v us as He sees to be best. This precious les had not come to the Psalmist all at once. TH had been a time when he had been mad cowardly enough to keep away from God ; all that time his bones seemed to waste a through his daily complaining. Then at last saw the only right and wise thing was to fall the Lord's feet, and then for the first time he re *found* forgiveness, knew that it was *really his*. prayer was a confession that he had not trust and taken God as his guide, that he had lost way and then had not courage enough to confess. When he *did* speak, he says, after long estran ment and silence, he found forgiveness and comfort. And what gave him hope that this forgiveness and comfort would not fly away in a li time but might really stay with him, was blessed promise of the text which he heard C speaking within his heart, "I will inform thee a teach thee in the way wherein thou shalt go, a I will guide thee with mine eye." Only as repeated to other men the blessed message wh had brought such peace to his own troubled sp he explained the way to keep and profit by G fatherly guidance. They must first make up th minds that they really would follow His guidan they must remember that His

and mule had no understanding but had held in with bit and bridle.

We shall understand these words better if we think a little what kinds of government and guidance there are in the world, and so come out exactly which is meant here. It is not the prayers for guidance that are right prayers; such prayers come from anything rather than from trust in the Lord.

Ask yourselves then, first, whether when you say you wish to be ruled, you mean that you wish to be ruled as the dead things we see with our eyes, as the sun and moon and stars are appointed for the day and night in their several ways, or as the seasons are appointed for winter and seed-time and harvest? Do you wish that God should fix everything for you, just as he fixes for the trees when they are to put forth their leaves and when they are to cast them again? This is a very natural prayer. When we have forgotten what very bad care we take of ourselves, we often come to think that the best thing for us would be to give up all doing of one's own and let everything be settled for us by God. But that is not God's way. We may know it is not by that which we find in the world. If you ask yourselves, you know there is nothing in you which there is not in the sun or moon or earth or trees. You *cannot* be ruled and guided as they are. You may be told just when to do a thing and when to avoid doing *that* thing :

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thing in you which says "I will" or "I will not." Some strange power you have of not obeying the most powerful king and ruler. Yes, we know well, we have a power of disobeying God's commands of saying even to them "I will not." Strange as this is, it is true; and therefore the kind of rule which is enough for the stars and the trees is not enough for us. We, poor worms of the earth, want a guidance which they do not want. If we needed only what they need, we should not *ask* at all, a prayer would mean nothing: we should simply move or be still. God bade us without thinking or feeling or wishing at all about either. That we are able to think, to feel and wish, most of all, that we are able to *ask*, is the one great thing which puts us by ourselves.

That is one kind of guidance. Now let us look at another. Ask yourselves whether in your hearts you wish God to rule and guide you according to your own thoughts and wishes? We have just found out that, unlike the stars and trees, we have thoughts and wishes; what more natural than to ask God our Ruler to rule us accordingly? At some moments of our lives this is seen to be the most absurd and contradictory of prayers, but at other times it exactly expresses the very wish of our hearts. No man that has ever prayed to God at all does not remember sometimes offering a prayer which meant just this, 'O Lord, I pray Thee, guide me in the way which I like best. Take the management of me, but let me say in what way I wish to be managed: Let me

come to God to guide us, because we have our own desires such miserable guides : and yet we turn to Him after all to follow no better counsels ! It is folly for ourselves, strange presumption towards Him as if He were likely to alter the great order which He has made for the world, if we or any one else wished it ! That would be unkindness, to leave our unruly wills for ever to lead each other in the dark.

But there is a third kind of guidance which we may also pray for. The more we have of our own will, the more the misery and evil into which we have fallen ; following our own wishes, the more inclined we are to be to ask God to leave our wishes alone, and to drive us and carry us how and where He will. There is hope in such a prayer : it may lead us to the very truth ; but there is also weakness of faith in it. For a short time we may be content to say, ' O God, though I be ever so unwilling, let me be forced on in this or that direction ; I hate to move, compel me to move : though I would to be still, compel me to be still.' But this is a contradictory a kind of prayer to last. We know now that what makes the difference between such things as the sun and stars is that they have no wishes and they have not : and what kind of guidance would that be which let alone just the distinguishing part of us ? What kind of guidance is it that God is to give, if our wishes are to be

mouths must be held with bit and bridle. Horses and mules have some kind of wishes of their own, but when we want to use them, we do not trouble ourselves about their wishes. Perhaps they want to stop and eat, but we make them go on. Perhaps they want to take the left hand turn of the road, but we make them take the right. The reason is because we require them for our own use, not theirs. Their wishes, unlike ours, can never rise into prayers. They cannot *ask* us to rule and guide them. But search yourselves, brethren, whether this is the kind of guidance you want from God. No doubt it is just the guidance on which He will be obliged to fall back, if you refuse all other. He cannot and will not have His laws broken for nothing. If you *will* try your strength against Him, you will sooner or later, as surely as a stubborn horse, find out to your cost which is master, He or you. But can you wish this? He offers to be your guide not for His own sake so much as for yours. His government is not according to His mere will and pleasure, but because any other leads *you* to destruction.

And now, brethren, we are enabled to see more clearly what kind of guidance we *should* pray for. We do not say, Guide us as the sun and stars are guided, or, Guide us according to our own wishes or even merely, Guide us against our own wishes but, Guide first our wishes, for then our whole selves will follow. Take the rule and government over

earth as quietly, obediently, and joyfully heaven. We could not offer such a prayer without trust. When we know in whom we have believed, when we are persuaded not only of His power and wisdom but of His love and care for us, His patience in long suffering with all our slips and falls, then we can venture to ask Him to guide aright not only our hands and feet and tongues, but the secret movements of our hearts. And the psalm tells us how He answers such a prayer:—‘I will inform thee, and teach thee in the way wherein thou shalt walk. I will guide thee with mine eye—(think of how to be guided by God’s steady, calm, piercing and most gracious eye)—I will take charge of thy way, I will chasten it, and soften it, and subdue it; to enlighten it about *my* will, to make it feel and know the blessedness of that will, the utter misery of seeking otherwise. You shall see what things you have to aim at. You shall understand what things hinder you in reaching those ends, and how you may overcome them. You shall walk in the sense that there is over you a Father which sees what you cannot yet see, which sees the winding of the path between you and it: and more than that, you shall find your own eyesight becoming clearer day by day to distinguish little things from great, and good things from evil. And if you persevere in trust and hope in the Lord of heaven and earth, what you do not know now, you shall know hereafter.’

XV

LIFE FROM THE DEAD

"I AM he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive evermore."—*Rev. i. 18*, part.

EASTER is the festival of *life*; not however mere life, but *life from the dead*.

Life and Death, these are two familiar words. One can reach middle age without being now then haunted by their power; some come to know them well at much earlier years. But though life comes before death, we hardly even think about death or remember that we are enjoying it till some change or other has forced death into our thoughts. When we are very young, unless some most unusual sickness or want presses us down, we are full of happiness and full of activity without thinking much about either. As we grow up into riper years, when we are still in the freshness of youth, we think more about ourselves and the things we should like to possess and enjoy. But we still think very little about the wonderful power which lies wholly with

cannot imagine ourselves without it. Death in the lower world around us is before our eyes all the time every day, yet we give it no heed. We see the bright flowers decay away in autumn, or pluck and suddenly in the midst of their beauty and shrivel up in a few hours. We see insects and birds and even the larger animals stopped short in the swing of their movement, and becoming foul and dead things. But these are too far removed from ourselves to touch us. Nay, our own neighbours or it may be companions, may sicken and die about us, and yet we may give little heed.

Presently a change comes. Perhaps one of our own family, for whom we have greatly cared, is taken from us and hidden away in the churchyard. It is a strange, overpowering feeling, when it comes home to us that their life by our side is ended and that they have vanished for ever on this earth from our sight. The loss to us is unlike any other personal loss which we have known: and then another thought springs up, that *our* life on earth likewise is not for ever, but must come to an end soon or later, perhaps very soon. Or again, the change may come from dangerous illness to ourselves. We may lie, as we say, at death's door and have to face the awful truth that in a few days we ourselves possibly have left the bright world which has been a home to us for another world which, whether its brightness or its darkness is certainly strange

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Time goes on. We pass into the dust and of our middle years. The first sharp impression made by death grows fainter. We come perhaps to think of death only as one of the unavoidable of a rather sorry yet not altogether worthless world. It mixes dimly with a number of other things which take away the colour and glory that we used to think we saw around us, closing in upon our world with a roofing of dull cloud. To many at last the character changes. It is desired rather than dreaded. They have lost hold on all which used to make life seem worth having. They may have no clear hope in death, but they are ready to welcome it in a helpless sort of way as a deliverance from sharp pain or fretting trouble or the mere weariness of old age. They are tired of work, and death promises them some kind of rest, they do not exactly know, but indeed very much care, what.

Thus in one way or another death, the fear of death in ourselves or the thought of death in others first makes us feel and know about life, so far as we feel and know about it at all. We are so apt to take everything for granted in a blind, heedless way. It never occurs to us what wonderful powers we are using every day of our lives, to say nothing of other powers not less wonderful which lie idle and hidden within us, and perhaps will so lie wasted to the end because we live too poor and earthly a life to bring them forth. But a time does come sooner or later

festly ended by death, is made up of the parts that belong to us as breathing human creatures: some always at work, others at work now and then, others idle and at rest, but ready to wake up at the bidding.

But death not only comes after life; it is mixed with life. Life is after all a thing of degrees. We may say, as St. Paul does, that death works in us while we are still living; we call all the wasting of age and disease and trouble the early inroads of death by which he prepares the way for his great victory at the end. Or we may merely say that we have less or more of life, a growth of life from childhood till we reach full maturity and then a slow lessening of life till with a sudden drop the end comes. Our bodies grow to their natural strength and fall to their natural weakness with old age by laws which cannot be broken. In the course of life many other chances overtake them to strengthen them or to weaken them, from our own things beyond our control. Our hearts and minds in some degree are under the same iron rule; they depend in part on the life of the body: they have at least the power of being lifted up when it is strong, but they are apt to sink when it is feeble. This is part of the truth, but only half. What is much more important remains. Our hearts and minds have a life of their own which up to a certain point is independent of the mere part of the life of the body. It may be

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and mind, brethren, is in no small degree in our own power: with us it rests whether it makes a good fight against death.

And now, brethren, look back on what we have been considering thus far. This order stands forth throughout, first life, then death: and life not known as life till death makes it plain. The pulse beats its term of years, the fourscore or threescore and more or less, and then is still. The warmth and activity of the fullest and keenest life grow faint, and a duller and colder time succeeds. Is this the end? Must our course be for ever downward? To this question, brethren, Easter supplies the answer. The text proclaims it in ringing words. There too we hear first of life, and then of death; but death is not the end. "I am he that liveth; and I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore."

In the early ages, long before Christ came, the brightness as of youth lay on some at least of the peoples of the world. They enjoyed the first fruits of life which does not yet truly know itself because it does not yet know death. You all can feel in yourselves the breath of that untroubled spirit, sobered but not overwhelmed by the fear of God, in the early books of the Old Testament, and even in the Psalms and the Prophets. At last death came, every sense of the word became familiar, and the spirit changed. The people became more and more corrupted and sinful, they were broken by the

them which they had not known before. Vanities seemed to be written on all human and human hopes.

Something of the same had been happening in other lands. There a brilliant and exulting life had flickered quickly into a hopeless and misbegotten age. They had no Law and Prophets to point the way to the throne of God as the darkness thickened over the earth and their own hearts. Death and the power of death held them in cruel bondage.

Then one dark night the glory of the Lord came round some Jewish shepherds as they kept watch over their flocks, and an angel spoke to them and told them that he brought them good tidings of joy which should be to all people. I need not repeat the story of Christmas. The child born that night in the neighbouring village grew up to be a man. Thirty years He lived unknown in retirement. Then for a few months He came forth in public to declare the good news of the kingdom of God and to shew to the people the marks and tokens of the kingdom by healing the sick, casting out devils, and raising the dead to life. At last He too died, a cruel and shameful death. But on the third day He rose again from the dead, shewed Himself alive to His disciples for forty days, and then ascended into the heaven from which He came. This was seen in a vision by His beloved disciple John to whom He spoke those wondrous words

from me all living things draw their life: yet my life is not one that has nothing to do with death: I have known death, I have gone through it, and come forth from it unconquered. My life is not only a life before death, but a life after death. Death itself is swallowed up in my life.'

That message was spoken to a dying world. By opening the New Testament and reading the Acts and Epistles and the book of Revelation, we learn of the change which came when the Risen Son of God was made known. That Church rose into a being of which at this day it is our privilege to be members. A second and better life came forth, not like the former life ignorant of death, but knowing it and triumphing over it in the name of Him who had died and risen again. The dying world went on its way. They who heard the voice of the Son of Man were but few: but they spread and spread and at last they prevailed.

And now what meaning has the news of our risen Lord for us? The faith which is built on this and all the other parts of His great work of redemption is familiar to our ears from childhood. Yet what effect has it on us? Are not our ordinary thoughts and ways only too like those which were common in the age of death into the midst of which Christ came? Yet His work stands for ever, and His words cannot pass away.

I will not dwell to-day on the great hope beyond

death is but a poor sort of life compared with the heavenly life beyond.

But I wish rather to lead you to the source of another life which are hidden in Christ and the power of His Resurrection, a second life which we can enjoy here on this earth. We saw while ago that there is a death which mixes with our present life, enfeebling it and dragging it down to that death of the heart and mind which robs us in our age and old age of the joy and hope which God has meant for all men. So far as this death depends on our bodies, it cannot be undone. Youth has its own peculiar honours and gifts which it takes away, and is ever taking away, much to our recall, though it has new gifts in store for those who are willing to take them and use them. It is the worst part of that inward death comes from our choosing to have no life but that which we share with the lower creatures. We are made in God's image, made to look up to Him and love Him and fear Him and love Him and trust Him, made to live by the rule of His commandments and to fall into disorder and misery when we disobey them. While we keep our hearts and minds fixed on Him first, all other good and worthy things have power to delight us, all lower things interest us less but lose none of the worth which God has assigned them: we have within us an abundant source of high thoughts and high feelings.

we have kept, nay that we have ever possessed this blessed power in any large measure? Yet this it is which is the true fountain of life. And when middle age has come, and the mind is faltering and barren, and the heart cold and dry, is there any remedy? Can the lost or never found life be fetched out of heaven? It is hard to believe that it can: thousands tell us that there is no hope. There is *none* save in Him who was dead and alive again. The power of His Resurrection can quicken even dead hearts. Those that turn to Him and seek His grace to renew a right spirit within them, will see the whole world changed before them: it will be as though a damp grey mist slowly or suddenly cleared, and they found themselves walking in sunshine.

Here then on this Easter Day listen to the call which God gives you through His Church in telling you how He raised His son from the dead to be the author of life from the dead to all creatures made in His likeness. Do not delay, but fix yourselves to His service by coming at once to His holy table. Strange that our Lord's words to the Jews should be so true of us all, "*Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life.*"

One word, lastly, to the young, and especially to those who have lately been confirmed. Your natural life, the springtide of the body, is still strong within you. Bless God for that great gift

keen and active, set them firmly for ever living Lord. The return from the death life of the spirit is never impossible, but it is at last hard indeed. Happy are you that by your power to need no such return. If you are in the right way now, you shall go on from strength to strength, and find all through your life while the outward man is failing and perishing the inward man is being renewed day by day. Make a beginning now by coming fearlessly to Christ's table. Begin the new and better life to-day: let it be known at once both that you are to serve your God and that you look on Him as your Father and not your betrayer. The God, who was dead and is alive for evermore, will give you as His own.

XVI

OUR COMMONWEALTH IN HEAVEN

“FOR our conversation is in heaven.”—*Phil.* iii. 20.

THE word ‘heaven’ is probably oftener in our minds than any other of what we call the good words of the Bible. There is hardly any time when we cannot give it some kind of meaning, and turn our meaning into a wish, if nothing more. Some of the thoughts which the Bible brings before us cannot easily make an impression on a very sinful or even a very thoughtless man. ‘God,’ ‘Christ,’ ‘peace,’ ‘holiness,’ ‘love,’—these are words which we sometimes do not like hearing at all. If we are in a bad state of mind ourselves, there is nothing within us at that moment which answers to those words, which lays hold of them, and rests gladly in them. Nay more, often enough those words will be actually distasteful and painful to us when we are in a wrong state of mind; because

to walk. But, as I said, it is not quite the same with the word 'heaven.' *That* we may hear enough in the midst of evil doing, and yet not shrink from it. It is well worth our while to inquire how this can be. It ought to be so to us that we can bear to think of heaven, though we cannot bear to think of God, the Lord of heaven. Considering how large a place 'heaven' is to fill in *all* our serious thoughts, it concerns us not to have a wrong notion of heaven. And I cannot see how it is possible for those who love God to love heaven, unless they have a very different notion of heaven from what He has, and from what is written in His book. One thing at least we may easily see. When we are enjoying ourselves in a way which we know to be wrong, we are disturbed by the thought of God, because we feel in our hearts that the way in which we are now regarding us and our doings is quite the reverse of enjoyable: but on the other hand, our thought of heaven is apt to be nothing but a hindrance to enjoyment. We are not likely at such a moment to remember what the enjoyments of heaven will be. But, if we did, it would come nearly to the same end: one enjoyment cannot well set itself at run against another enjoyment: it does not make much difference that our sinful enjoyment is *now*, and heaven is still to come. That which we have now before us gives its own colour

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about it as a place of enjoyment, and that, with which we have nothing to do till after we are dead. This is one step towards thinking right about heaven: and how to do this we must learn from the Bible. I cannot promise that what the Bible says on the matter can be put into such a short plain shape as that notion of enjoyment which *any* man—I might almost say, any beast,—can take in. Heaven can be seen, just as God can be seen only by those who have something of a heavenly and Godlike sight. Blessed are the pure in heart, says Christ, for they shall see God. All the cleverness and knowledge in the world will not make God plain to those whose hearts neither are nor wish to be pure, who are content to go on wallowing in their own filth. And it is just the same with seeing and understanding about heaven: to those also must always remain dark and shadowy to those whose thoughts are taken up with the things of the earth.

But others may learn something at least about heaven from the words of my text. You will see at once that, whatever St. Paul may mean, he is talking of something which is not ours now but may become ours some time hence. He is talking of something which now is. "Our conversation is in heaven." The next thing to ask is what is meant by 'conversation.' It has nothing to do with what we in the present day commonly mean by conversation, that is, talking. It means rather our life, that

belong whether we choose it or not. More perfectly still, it is the country or nation or city of which we are members and citizens, in which we are numbered. It is that city of Jerusalem above, which St. Paul writes of to the Galatians, which is the mother of all, the city of God. We belong to a great commonwealth, and that commonwealth is in heaven. We *shall* belong, but we *do now* belong to the heavenly commonwealth. This is not some slight accidental honour added to our life. It is the frame and truth of our life itself. We belong to heaven first and foremost, not by an afterthought. Heaven comes first, not earth. We are first citizens of heaven, and last citizens of heaven, and citizens of heaven all the while between : earth comes in by the way ; it has no deep and lasting rights over us.

Let us look a little more at St. Paul's words as set before the Philippians as their example, and the faithful followers of Christ. It was necessary for him to give them this warning, because there were many who were disposed to do no such thing, though they had listened to St. Paul's preaching, and called themselves Christians, disgraced His name by the way they gave themselves up to the world. To receive Christ, to believe in Christ, is to receive and believe in One who had been crucified to death on the Cross. Therefore none could understand Christ, much less give themselves up to His service and be Christians indeed.

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their own when they were called Christians was who had conquered by suffering: that marked Him from all the other Lords: He was the Prince of sufferers. None could be His true disciples who thought enjoyment the greatest of blessings, and suffering the worst of evils. They had to follow their Master, and therefore they had to suffer like Him.

This was one lesson of the Cross. Another was to welcome *shame* for Christ's name as well as suffering. To some perhaps this was the harder trial of the two. No one likes being sneered at and pointed at by his neighbours: yet that was what a true soldier of the Cross had to bear. It is natural and right for us all that we should glory and take pride in something or other. If we are good enough to thank about our God, then we glory and take pride in Him more than anything else, because He is the highest and most wonderful being with whom we have anything to do. Think then what it was for men in a heathen city to have their highest pride and glory in a Jewish carpenter who had been executed as a criminal by the most disgraceful of deaths. Yet that was what a Christian, a worshipper of the Crucified, had to do. Here we see what those false-hearing Christians, about whom St. Paul writes, refused to do. "Many walk," he says, "of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ." What a desc-

of Christ. What follows explains why. "Vain end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." The end, the purpose, which they set before themselves, to live for this life and its enjoyment would end in destruction: the things which they loved in place of Christ would soon perish, and their hearts which were fixed so intently upon them would be found at last grasping at empty air and falling into the abyss where their pleasures had gone before them. Their god, the only thing which they worshipped and for which they were willing to make sacrifices, was their own belly. That over which they could eat, drink, and be merry, which promised enjoyment to themselves and had no higher end beyond, was more to them than He who redeemed them. They could understand nothing of Him who pleased not Himself, but freely gave Himself to be tormented by every enemy of God and man. Their glory was in their shame. There was a true glory in shame, such a glory as St. Paul had when he said, "God forbid that I should glory in the cross of Christ Jesus my Lord, by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world." But this was not their glory. That which they took pride in did not at all let them down in the eyes of their heathen countrymen; rather the reverse. They gloried in a life of such enjoyment as seemed natural and praiseworthy to those who knew not

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"Who mind earthly things." They measure every thing by an earthly standard. They thought of how much they could get of this or that. They let all their thoughts be debased and defiled with perishable things which belong to the earth alone. The higher powers of man which dwell in his spirit which are holier and purer than mere taste or sight or feeling, such powers as trust and love and gratitude and worship, were nothing in their eyes. Such powers brought no sweets for any taste untaught to receive them, they fetched no money in the market and therefore they were thought worthless. These enemies of the cross of Christ would have nothing to do with them.

From this sad picture St. Paul turns away. As to what does he now turn for the instruction of the Philippians? Not to some bright picture of the holiness and faith of himself or his better converts who had more truly learned Christ. No, to the marvellous blessing and glory which actually belong to them all, to those enemies of the cross of Christ as much as to the most godly of all. Without that blessing and glory the heinousness and folly of the others' sin could not be seen in its true colours. "For our commonwealth is in heaven." There is our true home. The things of the earth are ours to handle and use and enjoy rightly: but we must not let them hide from us the better world to which we even now belong. That is the sin of those other faithful Christians.

not believed that the commonwealth to which they belong has anything to do with an ever present or ever living heaven. They have thought themselves mere creatures of the earth, whose work was to suck the greatest possible enjoyment from the pleasures of the creatures of the earth.

But what possible meaning can there be in St. Paul's words, if his notion of heaven was such as ours so often is, by merely adding to the pleasures in our minds all the pleasantest of earthly things, and supposing that they are to be the prize of the hence of present self-denial? The heaven of which he speaks must indeed belong most truly to the far distant future: if it did not, what would be the meaning of the hopes of a better world which lie so deep in all our hearts? But it must be a heaven which is not only above us, but within us now, all our lives through: and it must be a heaven which can have no charm for those who are dissatisfied with the things of eye and palate and touch. And, if so, God Himself, and nothing lower than Himself, must be the very heart and life of the heaven, St. Paul's heaven. I do not know how I could more truly describe it than by saying that it is the presence of God. Where He is, there is heaven: and where He is not, there is hell. Our common thoughts of heaven are not too high, but too happy: on the contrary they are too poor and mean. "In Thy presence is the fulness of joy."

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Is it certain that we all can rise to that wondrous height and see God Himself face to face? This is a dark question which the devil may put into our minds. To this and all such doubts St. Paul's strong words are an answer. Our commonwealth *is* in heaven. It is not a matter of climbing from a low state to a high state, of changing ourselves from citizens of the earth to citizens of heaven. We belong to heaven already; we have belonged to it in the counsels of God before the worlds were made. If we do not enter into the joys, as we might, it is from our own sin, not from God's making. He has made us for His own presence. By His holy baptism He declares to all our neighbours that He acknowledged even us, as heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven. He gives us manifold tokens of our heavenly calling. By all the dull, sad weariness which comes upon us when we have been trying to glut ourselves with anything rather than Him, He is teaching us that He Himself is our first and most natural food of all. By all the better risings within us which find no rest till they have settled upon Him, He is teaching us where our true home lies. By all the pure and holy thoughts for each other which we ever feel are themselves heavenly: they belong to us as children of the Father who has loved His only begotten Son from everlasting. To train us in God's own blessed way for the time when we shall all together as one man see

XVII

THE TEST OF SPIRITUALITY

“WHEREFORE I give you to understand that no man speaking Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed : and that no man can say Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost.”—1 *Cor.* xii. 3.

TO-DAY, brethren, being Whitsunday, we naturally led to think of the ways in which God the Holy Ghost works among men. On the one hand, our services remind us of the great event described in the passage of the Acts read for the Epistle, which came to pass on the first day of Pentecost, the day of Christ's Resurrection and Ascension. That day the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles came with signs and wonders : there was a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind : cloven tongues of fire appeared to sit on the head of each Apostle, and all were suddenly enabled to praise God in a variety of languages before unknown to them. On the other hand we in our own time have to do

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hearts so stilly and peacefully that we too often not find out His presence. Yet He who came to Apostles on that first Whitsunday is the same who breathes upon our hearts and wills now, and a passage like the text may help much towards saving us from losing the blessing of Whitsuntide through seeming unlikeness to our own experience.

Most of us, I suppose, have sometimes thought that we were born into an age less highly favoured by God than that of the Apostles. We may have thought it less honourable that all things should come on by a slow, regular order than that quick, startling results should come to pass through men endowed by God with more than human power. So persons in our own day have believed that God's presence could not truly be with any Church or religious body which had not some such wonderful works to boast of, as wrought by the hands of its members. Thus a door has been opened for every kind of imposture, and men's minds have been drawn from the plain, broad, enduring teaching of the Gospel to hunt after lying wonders, which have no power to turn the heart to God, and have forgotten the one true Holy Spirit in seeking for strange spiritual workings among men. This is a temptation, brethren, which may assail us at any moment, even if it has not assailed us up to this time. There is something within us which is so strongly moved by the sight of any great power different from what we have been accustomed to see, that we may easily

we are not beguiled by any such false pretence of the Divine Presence, we are in great danger of thinking much that we might learn to our profit from the Bible, if we allow ourselves to think too highly of the special gifts which make the times in which it was written unlike our own. In saying that we ought not to allow ourselves to think much of these special gifts, I do not mean that we ought not to read and think about what the Bible says of them. On the contrary, the more we study what the Bible says of them, the better. If they had not some useful lesson to teach us, they would not be mentioned in the Bible. What we really want is that our wild fancies about them should be set right by the Bible.

In the chapter from which my text is taken Paul writes to the Corinthians on the nature of spiritual gifts (gifts like those of the day of Pentecost) which seem to have existed in great abundance in the Corinthian Church. But the standard which he sets forth for the benefit of that rich and luxurious city of the old bygone world are, I think, at least as much needed by us and as useful to us as a quiet English village in the nineteenth century.

It is plain, first of all, that the Corinthians fell into just the same mistake about their spiritual gifts as I spoke of just now as likely to beguile *our* people. They boasted of their gifts and thought it a very fine thing and a great mark of God's favour to

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to look down on their fellow Christians on whom God had not bestowed similar gifts, and regarded them as not much better than the heathen. The next natural step was to set one kind of gift above another according to an order of their own devising, esteeming those gifts highest which were most startling and unlike anything commonly done among men, even among Christians. Their watchword was 'the spirit.' The gifts were spiritual gifts, and those who possessed such gifts they called spiritual; and those most spiritual who possessed the most surprising gifts.

It is on this ground of spirituality that St. Paul meets them expressly. He agreed with them that they ought above all things to desire to be spiritual, and that those men were worthy of the highest honour who were endowed with the largest measure of the Spirit. But the question which he had to ask was: Did they really know much about the Spirit in which they made their boast? Did they really submit to its guidance and teaching, or set themselves above it as a private possession which they held for themselves, and other men did not? "Concerning spiritual things, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto the dumb idols, even as ye were led. They gloried now in gifts which carried them away out of the common course of their minds and the laws which usually rule human actions. But cou-

wood and stone which could not even speak to much less help them? Further, the most sure of their own present gifts, those therefore which worshipped most, were just the ones most like powers claimed by the priests and priestesses of dumb idols. Could they really believe those to be the most divine which were most like the notions of devils?

"Wherefore," he goes on, "I give you to understand that no man speaking by the Spirit calleth Jesus accursed." Those same false notions about spiritual powers which they had learned from heathens were cleaving to them still. They were suffering lessons learned from the doings of evil spirits to shape their thoughts about the doings of the Holy Spirit of God. We must not suppose that means only to blame them for this. It was partly their fault, but partly also their misfortune. They had a bias to wrong notions about spiritual working from their birth and education; the pride and arrogance came from their own evil hearts. Paul therefore shews them the root of their mistake. They fancied that power was the test of the presence of God's Spirit; but he says, No, not power, but truth. Heathen prophets may have power, wonderful power, but their doctrine and their worship lie. This was no new teaching. Moses had said just the same long ago in other words. Remember the beginning of the 12th chapter of Deuter-

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wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto the saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them : Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or thou shalt be a dreamer of dreams : for the Lord your God prove you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul." Even so was it at Corinth, and even so is it now. No man could speak by the Spirit of God, however great powers might have beyond the reach of ordinary men, if he called Jesus accursed, or shewed that in his heart he was prepared to do so. He might be filled with some spirit, but that spirit must be a devil. Such, I think, is the main drift of the first half of my text. Probably also some of these would-be spiritual Corinthians were ready to say " Accursed be Jesus," either because they were ashamed to confess Him before the heathen, or because they thought themselves so high and holy that they might do without the simpler doctrine which other Christians cherished. But, whether this be so or not, the latter half of the verse is quite easy, and equally important for the Corinthians and for us. " No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost." Here was a fatal blow to their narrow pride. That presence and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which they claimed as their own privilege distinguishing them from other Christians, did in reality belong to every one who in his heart and lips called

apostles, all were as truly inspired by God the Holy Ghost as the most eloquent speaker of tongues or the most successful worker of marvellous cures. It was their downfall for men who enjoyed setting themselves above their fellows! The great work, the proper and particular work, of the Holy Ghost is shewn to be of a kind which affects all men, and, though spiritual powers such as the Corinthians possessed did really come from Him, they did not partially shew forth His nature. They might be set up by God at a particular time for a particular purpose, and then pass away leaving no trace behind but the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, abides with us for ever, and His true and proper work goes on without ceasing from one generation to another.

This surely is blessed news to each and all of us. If any of us are setting ourselves up above our neighbours on the ground of higher spiritual gifts, greater wisdom and cleverness, it is a humbling thing to be brought down to the level of every one who knows that Christ is its Lord and Redeemer. But it is a humbling that may give us a more full entrance into the highest blessings than we ever had before. We too can call Jesus Lord; ours too the Holy Spirit. And when we have thus been brought low and compelled to confess our brotherhood with all our fellow sinners, we may become able to receive and enjoy the rich inheritance which we have possessed all along but which we have disregarded.

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And yet that is not enough. We may have the Holy Spirit, and yet we may grieve the Holy Spirit, and even—dreadful to think—quench the Holy Spirit, and be left at last in the outer darkness. What said our loving Saviour Himself, who has sent us the Holy Ghost to comfort us, when He was here on earth? “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” We may then in some sense believe Jesus to be Lord, and call Him so with our lips, and yet shew that in our heart of hearts we will not have Him to reign over us. We may submit His Spirit to inspire us to such a barren confession of faith, but refuse His godly warnings when He tries to mould our lives after the pattern of Christ, and it becomes necessary for us to give up some cherished sin. In the days of St. Paul it usually needed some courage to call Jesus Lord; for all the world around was given up to unbelief or idolatry, and to confess Jesus as Lord was to make known that you worshipped one whom the world thought of only as a poor Galilean who had been put to the most disgraceful of deaths by the Roman governor of Judæa.

in the midst of the outer signs of the Church, faith, and it requires less courage to call Him Lord with our lips than to deny Him. Yet now it is only the Holy Ghost that enables us to call Him Lord with our hearts as well as our lips. Strength, and power, and riches, and wisdom, and the like are all God's gifts, good gifts meant for our use and happiness. But if we think of them as the true almighties which can alone prevail in the world, we *cannot* call Jesus Lord; His cross, the shame and meekness and suffering, is a stumbling block to us; we cannot believe the Spirit of Holiness to be a *good gift* to men. The 'much' that is required of us is not to prophesy, or cast out devils or do wonderful works, but to do the will of our Father which is in heaven; in other words, to suffer. The Holy Ghost, through whom we like our neighbor have called Jesus Lord, to enable us to accept and do faithfully and well the plain duties which every Christian brings with it in the fear and love of God, and to do what in us lies to make our own little sphere of earth a true part of the kingdom of heaven.

XVIII

HUMILIATION BEFORE GOD

“HUMBLE yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time ; casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.”—1 *Peter* v. 6-7.

I HAVE at different times pointed out to you the plan on which the Collects for the various Sundays of the Christian year are written ; how they begin with making thankful mention of some great blessing received from God or some bright and blessed feature of His character as made known to us, and then the strength of that go on to offer to Him some prayer. They do not cry wildly to Him as an unknown and untried God. They start from some well-proved and remembered grace, and build on that foundation the confidence with which they beseech Him to grant the prayer now and for the time to come.

At first sight the Collect for to-day appears to

general that can be imagined. It is a mere echo of those words in the Litany, "We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord," which we utter after all sorts of prayers for all sorts of people. If we consider its own meaning, it expresses the simplest, nakedness of petition that is ever offered: a petition merely that we may be *heard* by God. It does not in many words ask Him to send down anything, but simply to listen and take heed. It comes from dread lest the cry which rises out of our hearts be lost, cry into the deaf sky; and the strong desire that the cry may at least *find* God, reach Him, enter His ears, and go home to His mind and not be scattered and melted away into nothingness.

But now let us observe what follows in the Collect. "And grant that we, to whom Thou hast given an hearty desire to pray, may by Thy mercy be defended and comforted in all dangers and adversities." The Collect here shows itself as really differing from other collects. Before it comes on to the special prayer which forms its latter part, it speaks of a gift of God. But what is that gift of God? Simply the hearty desire to pray. God gives us something more than those things which we pray for: He gives us the craving and the power to pray. This gift comes first: if it did not, His other gifts would profit us little.

Observe again how exactly the words used are related to what has gone before. The desire to pray

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true desire to pray, but only from a notion that prayer is expected of us or from a mere appetite for good things without any love for the Giver. A desire to pray implies a sense that prayer is not an easy thing, that we hardly know what to ask, but do greatly long to feel ourselves hanging upon God, and to be assured that He is entering into all our needs, whether He seem to supply them or no.

If then there is anyone here whom these words remind of what is sometimes present in his own heart, let him take them as an encouragement and a command. If anyone feels that he does not pray, and yet that in his better moments he has a longing to do so, he must surely see that *this* Collect at least is not in too high a strain for him. It fixes at once on the *desire* and builds on that. It does not tell him that he may be comfortable about himself because he has such good desires: but it bids him go on and take care that the seed bears fruit. The encouragement which it holds out is the strongest which can anywhere be found. The encouragement is that it is not we who have to make the beginning. The beginning is already made, and it is God Himself who made it. *He* sent the desire to pray. The work is already started from heaven, started from Him. We have but to keep it from coming to standstill and perishing. Whatever the other gift may be that we may go on to ask now or hereafter

not throw it away, the life and blessedness of other bounty.

The actual express prayer which follows Collect is a very plain one. It is for defence and comfort by God's mighty aid in all dangers and adversities. Nothing is said of benefits or gifts which we may desire. Other collects follow that prayer. Here we have not got so far as to be merely aware that we are in the presence of evil things which threaten us. These are dangers, dangers to our outward happiness, dangers to our inward character. We pray that God's mighty aid will defend us against these, will keep them off from us, so that, though they be near, they may not touch us. But again, we know that by His good providence we shall assuredly suffer some of these evil things; we cannot escape altogether while we are in this world. Then, when they come upon us, is the time for another prayer for help from God. Then we ask that His mighty aid will *comfort* us, cheer us up under the heavy pressure of evil, but yet more strengthen us to resist it, so that fulness of life within ourselves upon which the power of evil can make any lasting impression.

Such is the language of prayer taught us in the Collect. But all true prayer carries with it the activity of our own. It is never a mere folding of hands and going to sleep. What kind of

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them rightly, we shall see that any one who prays the Collect lazily on the strength of its speaking of mere desire, is in fact not praying it at all. For, put in other language what I said just now, even the simplest prayer requires at least two things—first a feeling of our own helplessness, and, second, an endeavour ourselves to do the will of God. Neither can be wanting where prayer is. If we think we can help ourselves, then God becomes only a makeweight which we soon come to treat as of no consequence. If on the other hand we do not strive for our own part to serve Him according to the best of our knowledge and power, then prayer loses its meaning; it is nothing if it is not the voice of servants to their Master whom they love, nay, we are bidden to serve under the Gospel, of children to a Father whose will it is their delight to search out and to do.

“Humble yourselves, therefore,” says St. Peter “under the mighty hand of God.” That word “therefore” sends us back to the verse before. The lesson about our way of carrying ourselves towards God comes out of a lesson about our way of carrying ourselves towards each other. So it always is in the Bible, as we have had several opportunities of learning lately. God has wonderfully linked together our duty to Himself and to other men. We always take a low and pitiful view of what we owe to *them* when *He* is forgotten. We always turn our worship of *Him* into a dead formalism when *they* are forgotten.

I will not repeat now what I said some weeks ago about this duty of every man to be subject to another. Part only of that duty is dwelt on so far here. Those who have learned that they were sent into the world to take care of themselves, to help forward the kingdom of God, and therefore to think first how they can make their lives most useful for the good of others, are here taught the foolishness and wickedness of setting themselves up above others. They are reminded that Christians must first have humble thoughts in their own hearts about their own excellences and deservings, and then let these humble thoughts be a power affecting all their dealings, and giving to their lives something of that Divine graciousness which can never be found in the contemptuous and proud.

Then observe the argument by which St. James shews us that our service of others must be rendered with a lowly mind. "For God," he says, "resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." Stop and think what is contained in that argument. St. James treats pride towards God and towards man as the same thing, and humbleness towards God and towards man as the same thing. We often hear people talking in the strongest language about their sinfulness and unworthiness towards God: every word of their lips and every glance of their eyes betrays how proud they are of this humility and how meanly they think of their

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All despisers of men He resists, He opposes Himself to them. They often complain how something is always in their way. That something is God. To them He is always a threatening pillar of cloud, while He pours forth light and warmth upon those who are lowly in their own eyes. They alone know what grace means, and so they alone receive grace.

Thus St. Peter, in preaching the necessity of humbleness towards all, has led us back to the fountain in humbleness towards the Lord of all. Now he brings forth into clear light the need which Christians have to let this spirit govern all their thoughts about Him. "Therefore," he says, "humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God." That weight which you have felt pressing you back, whenever you have lifted up yourselves and striven to get your greatness acknowledged, was the hand of God Himself. And that you know could not but be a strong hand: it was no wonder you could not push it aside. But it was not meant to crush you. All its strength will be put forth to lift you up, if you will submit to it and bend yourself joyfully to its pressure.

The weight of God's strong hand is felt by many who have not learned anything of His heart. It is so easy to forget Him, but it is not easy when He is remembered to suppose Him weak. Only the blindest folly can think that. We may not care for Him or His goodwill or His love. We may think a little of His mercy or His anger or His watchfulness.

for us to think of standing against it. But this is nothing Christian in all this. This is not humbling ourselves under His hand. Many a tongue is hushed with the well-worn phrase that we must submit to what God sends because we cannot resist Him. How many of those who utter the phrase are hypocrites confessing the Lord God of the Bible and the Church? Would not the words do as well when we felt ourselves unable to resist the wind or the lightning or the earthquake, mighty powers befitting gods? Nay, would not the words do as well when we felt ourselves the slaves of a great but evil spirit, Baal or a Moloch, instead of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? We must have some glimpse, thankful and joyful glimpse, of the goodness of heaven which moves the mighty hand on our behalf before we can bow down and worship with confidence.

Once more let me say it: to feel God's strength does not of itself humble us, though it is a necessary step to our being humbled. We may know ourselves beaten and crushed and smarting, and yet remain proud as ever all the while, hugging all the more closely our insulted dignity, and only filled with bitterness against Him who will not suffer us to have all and enjoy all that we desire. But in this we are resisting His gracious purposes. His hand is laid upon us in order that we may not lose remembrance of Him or suppose that His goodness is a

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what we have learned in the Gospel of His true character, by these two means together we are led to make willing confession before His throne. Then comes the knowledge how all His dealings are inspired by justice and graciousness. Then it becomes natural to us to yield ourselves up to Him to do with us as He pleases. And the end will surely be that in due season He will exalt us as we could never exalt ourselves. In due season, not immediately, not probably when we wish or how we wish. Our wishes themselves have to be shaped by humbled submission. We must not dream of doling out humility for the sake of a reward. The reward which He gives is the power of doing more work for Him and being the channels of greater blessings to our brethren, in which He is exalted and we are, may be, forgotten.

And beneath such humility there lies a deep feeling still, the feeling of entire trust. The hand that was found mighty to bruise will be found no mightier to bless. When we not only cease to resist it, but strive to be led by it, we learn to do without caring for ourselves; we can joyfully cast on Him the burden of anxiety which surely grows as life moves on, because we know that He cares for us and has both power and will to give us what we need. Without such confidence humility itself is not possible. Without humility, faith in the righteousness and loving kindness of God becomes the prerogative of those who surpass themselves to be

with Christ in heavenly places. Every true p
a confession of our lowness, and at the same
joyful use of our privilege as children of th
High God. Every joy that befalls us has in
thing humbling ; every sorrow that befalls u
it something glorifying. Both alike are m
give us fuller possession of our own rich inh
which we are so strangely willing to leave un
the inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven.

XIX

THE COMING OF OFFENCES

“THEN said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offence will come; but woe unto him through whom they come!”—*Luke* xvii. 1.

THIS is one of the passages that meet us here and there in the Gospels, which, if we think about them, leave behind a peculiar feeling of sadness. They make us sad for two reasons, on account of the words said, and on account of Him who utters them. It does not go against us to read of Christ as a grave man, whose words are always solemn and nearly always quiet. We feel that one who was born to be our Saviour could be no other than that. But there is something startling when His words are not merely solemn but mournful, when we feel that He is not only teaching us what we ought to know and what we ought to do, but is actually in some measure laying bare the depths of His own heart before us.

all things to come as well as all things gone, who could never forget the salvation which God Himself bringing to pass, the grace which should overcome even more than sin, the victory which should overcome up death, should yet be smitten with a true sorrow. It seems as if God's own seal were set to all our worst fears in our darkest moments, if sin and death were after all the real masters of the world, and God could keep for His own more than their leavings, here one and there another.

And yet, once more, could we wish it otherwise with Christ? We know in our own selves, in the best men that we have ever known, the strongest faith in God and in the might and the lastingness of His kingdom does not root out pain and anxiety which somehow or other come upon themselves upon us as we journey through life. Can we wish Christ to have shewn no fellowship with us in this respect? If His words were not written so plainly in His own words, we firmly believe that God Himself goes into every deep in which we may sink, and His love is anything more than the easy kindness of a cheerful master?

But even when we feel that words express pain have no unfitness for the lips of the Son of Man, we may still be troubled at finding that so deeply in the Gospel, in the book whose purpose is to tell us good news. But here too we may

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being beaten down by any check, and desire only what is pleasant to the taste of their bodies or the minds, but for people of all ages and all places of life. For many of them it would not seem a book of good news at all, if it did not echo the deeper voices of their own hearts, and repeat back to them all which they had ever felt which was not itself sinful.

It is of course true, and the truth ought not to be concealed, that much in a book of this kind must seem dull and gloomy in the eyes of those who have never known what any kind of trouble means, or who are too selfish and rebellious to have been softened by such troubles as they have passed through. They can take no more pleasure in its voice than a deaf man can in sweet sounds. They have yet to learn how very small a space is filled by their own favourite pleasures or prides or gains in God's great world, and how serious a side there is to the lightest or the busiest life, out of sight it may be for the present but not the less truly there. It is not that God is the enemy of any happiness which He permits His creatures to enjoy : but that He desires to purify His children's joy, to fill it with thoughtfulness for each for the others, and with thankfulness towards Himself. The lightest of heart can seldom go through a day without coming into the presence of some sorrow of others or some wickedness of others. It is well that he should know a little that there are such things in the world : and well that knowing them he should

life is not all play and sunshine. No real joys ever come from any one who knows nothing of shadows.

It is therefore a bad sign when we find ourselves annoyed and troubled by sad words spoken by our Lord, such as those of the text. If there is nothing else, they are a blessed reminder to us of God's own knowledge of and care for the misdeeds of men which we shall assuredly know some day. God spares our lives, supposing that we do not know them now. But they are often much more than we often give us hints of the way to freedom and peace, and shew us how often we make our lives heavier than they need be by our own wilfulness.

"It is impossible but that offences will come," says Christ. It is impossible but that men will sometimes stumble and fall; and that not without excuse; for there are always stumbling blocks on the way. The roads or ways of life are countless, and each man has his own. But whatever a man's way may be in life, he cannot possibly go on smoothly along it without being interrupted. A great stone will block it up here, a tree will have fallen across it there, a ditch will have been dug across it in a third place, and so on. He who is always on the lookout, or he will be in great trouble, it will require all his care and courage to get over these various obstacles or offences which lie on his way: and unless he succeeds in doing that

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trouble and annoyance which hampers our free action, everything in short which merely *hurts* us. But, however that may be, He must have had in mind most of all those offences or stumbling blocks which not only *hurt* and trouble us, but which lead us into sin. This is a worse kind of stumbling. It does not so very much matter if we are kept from doing what we wish. But it is a very serious matter to be beguiled away from doing what God wishes.

Now observe Christ's truthfulness and anxious justice. We are much too apt to think that God only wants to make out a bad case against us, that He counts all our misdoings at the worst reckoning and makes few or no allowances. But it is not so. Here we have an instance of God's entirely righteous judgement. Christ tells us plainly that the world is full of stumbling-blocks, that there are thousands of things which we are sure to meet with, which make it difficult for us not to sin ; and that, if these were all away, it would be a much easier matter to keep from sinning.

This is the kind of excuse which some persons are very fond of making for us all, and which we each of us now and then make for ourselves. Many wrong things have grown up so much around us that it requires a great effort to get loose from them. Many others are very pleasant, and cannot be kept at a distance, but are constantly shewing their pleasantness close to our very eyes. All this Christ

all be hard upon sin. He tells us plainly that sin has always been, now is, and will be evermore. He is upon sin to the uttermost: for so long as sin is to be found anywhere, there He will be its unremitting enemy and persecutor to the last: He cannot make peace with sin without going against His own nature. And no excuses can altogether make sin be anything but sin. He is Himself the teacher of every man as to what is right and what is wrong, and no man can go astray without knowing it. As I said, He does not forget any stumbling-block which may have made it harder not to sin. He knows that it is impossible but that offences should be set to every man.

But every such offence has also its use. A man gets the better of it, and do not suffer it to turn him out of God's way, then it becomes to us an instrument of good and not of evil. Suppose some great temptation to be coming in a month's time upon a man without their knowing it beforehand. Suppose that the first of them meets with nothing all through the month to try him, and suddenly finds himself face to face with the great temptation: you can easily see that he is in sore danger of being conquered by it. But suppose that a fortnight hence a second man meets with a lesser temptation: perhaps he may have a tough struggle before he can overcome it, but still he may not improbably succeed. And, if so, when he meets the great tempta-

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come this danger also than his fellow, who had no such trial by the way. Thus by God's help we may turn stumbling-blocks and offences, temptations and tribulations into helps and blessings. We may use them to God's glory and our own establishing, and then we shall have reason even to rejoice in them, for they will have exercised our patience and enabled us to baffle the tempter by means of his own devices.

For after all it is from the devil and not from God that they proceed, though God uses them and invites us to use them for his own gracious ends. Christ does not in the least conceal that. These stumbling-blocks are evil, and alas! they do not always come quite straight from the devil's own workshop. Many of themselves, our own brethren, are his agents for putting them in our way. It is a frightful thought, but it is a true one: whether we know it or not, we are every one of us agents of the devil, employed by him to drag our parents and children and brothers and sisters and neighbours down into destruction. No one can say how early it begins. There is perhaps no child in this church so young that it may not to-day lead some other little child in doing what it ought not, which is only another name for sinning against God and doing the works of the devil. It is a sad thought that we are each surrounded by countless stumbling-blocks every day of our lives. But how much more sad to think that we may ourselves be every day putting stumbling-blocks in the way of every one near us. Well might the pitying Saviour

carelessness of ours to say, "It is impossible but offences should come." True, it is not in our power to prevent any one near us from finding stumbling blocks in his way. But at least we might have them somewhat fewer. If he has given way to temptation and yielded himself to the devil's will, yet there may have been a last straw which broke down his strength ; and perhaps it was by our doing that the last fatal straw was laid upon him.

One instance comes prominently before us in the morning. God's table stands ready, and we are invited to approach it. Many, I am sure, are deterred by the habit of staying away not because they have made up their minds and firmly made up their minds against it, but because they doubt and falter about it and put off their decision to another time and so form a habit of staying away. They forget the mischief which they do to others by setting an example of neglect. They forget what a powerful encouragement they supply to others by their presence, since the presence of every fresh communicant would be a cheering to many who are now wavering. As the text says, "It must needs be that offences come: there will be many who will stay away from the Lord's table and find easy excuses for so doing. Yet woe to him through whom the offence comes ; woe to him whose coolness and hesitation have discouraged others." That presence at the feast of their Lord's love might have been a safeguard to them through

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as they have been led astray by what we have done or left undone. So close and strong are the chains with which God has linked us to each other.

But blessed be His Holy Name, there is another side to this picture. The power—the power of men and women and children—is as mighty for good as for evil. The sight of one quiet act of holiness may enable a brother to leap over a score of stumbling blocks. If we do not know the harm we are capable of doing to others, still less do we know the good. It is not by loud talking or loud doing: it is by silently striving to do God's will before Him alone. This particular act may never be known to any other creature: but what St. Paul calls the sweet smell of life. There is a blessed and divine air about the lives of those whose most secret acts are wrought in the fear and love of God, which is most refreshing and life-giving to those who are faint and weary struggling with temptation. This is the truest and best way by which men can be taught to glorify the Father in heaven. When they see such heavenly light shining from the life of a poor sinner like themselves, and feel the glow of love and tenderness which follows it, they learn to know the meaning of the words which they hear in church about God's holiness and love. And then the Gospel will be no longer to them a sad book, though there were a thousand more woes written in it; for they will find there in Him who lived and died for them their only Elder Brother, the true and perfect Father.

XX

THE SINS OF THE FATHERS AND THE CHILDREN

“THE soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son.”—*Ezekiel* xviii. 20.

THE Prayer-book begins with another verse from the same chapter. “When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.” This is the blessed and holy message with which the Church invites us to approach God’s throne in worship. It declares the unchangeable law in God’s government of the world, which nothing can ever destroy or even make void. Those words carry us back to the text. The text explains to us how they came to be spoken, and what is their exact force. And both verses will be clearer to us if we remember the first lesson of the morning, and what we there read about the pro-

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days of the prophet Ezekiel, were still keeping some kind of belief in God. However little they might be inclined to trust in Him, much less to obey Him, they believed that He had great power over them, and they thought that perhaps they might be able to persuade Him not to punish them any more. They therefore came to His prophet. But God refused to be so enquired of by such men. Though they were coming before Him, He declared, with the idols still in their hearts.

Now this sin of worshipping idols, which God laid to their charge more than any other, is forbidden in the second of the ten commandments: and the second commandment contains a warning such as we do not find in any of the others: "for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation, of them that hate me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments." Here God had plainly declared that this sin of idolatry would draw down His anger not only upon those who were themselves guilty of it, but upon their children to the third and fourth generation. It brought a curse which could not easily pass away. It rested on the family of the sinner as well as on the sinner himself, and, when he was dead, it would go on blighting the life and happiness of those whom he left behind him. The truth of these words was shewn at the time when

to break. And a curse it surely was. Whether they set up idols for themselves, or received them from their fathers, all other sin and misery went along with them. At last the judgement fell. The people were carried away prisoners to a strange land by the Babylonians. There in captivity they had sad leisure and opportunity to consider their own ways and God's.

And how did they use the opportunity which lay before them? The second lesson for this afternoon, the chapter of my text, gives the meek answer. "The word of the Lord came to me, saying, What mean ye that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?" It seems they knew the second commandment very well: but they cavilled at it. They were willing to believe that God was punishing them for their fathers' sins. This they declared that it was for their fathers' and fathers' sins. This they declared was God's way. They declared also that it was an unjust way. Their sense of God's anger hardened instead of softening them. They said, "The way of the Lord is not equal." They did not deny that God would have a right to punish them, if they had sinned; but they complained of the unfairness of having to suffer for the sins of their fathers.

This whole chapter is God's answer to these complaints of theirs. Do not let us suppose that we have nothing to say to it. We have as much

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that we do not ourselves go at least some way along with it? If so, we have no right to reject it, merely because we are only men, and God is God. Many would tell us that because God made us, and because He is an Almighty God, therefore He has a right to do just what He pleases with us: and therefore that we must not be surprised or shocked to find God doing that which would be unfair and unjust for mere man to do. It is strange that anyone who reads the Bible, above all the Gospel, with open eyes can think that this is the kind of faith which God requires of us. For the fruit of all such unworthy apologies for God is only mistrust of Him and carelessness about Him. For indeed such a God would not deserve our trust and love. It is no wonder that men are so willing to forget One whom they think to be capable of acts which they would be ashamed to commit themselves.

Very different is God's own answer to the murmuring children of Israel. He does not think it beneath Him to explain His purposes to them so far as they could understand them; for His great anxiety was that they should understand His purposes, and not darken their own and their neighbours' hearts with their own vain imaginations. "Behold, all souls are mine," He says, "as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: if the soul that sinneth, it shall die." Although God meant men to live in families and neighbourhoods,

confused heap in His dealings with them. He closely they may be joined together, not merely outward life and necessities, but in God's oversight, still each stands before Him as one being. Every soul is His. He made each soul. The father who begets a child is instrument in His hands. The infant that is God's child even more than his. God might have chosen, have brought the infant into being other way. Its soul may show marks of likeness to its father's soul just as much as its body may for all that it comes straight from God quickened with a spark from God's own life. "My souls are mine," He says. Each single soul belongs to Him, and has to render its account to Him. A man's breast is a secret castle into which no one can really enter. It knows its own bitterness and its own joys. This we all learn for ourselves, without anyone telling us. But God also sets His own seal upon this singleness of ours. He has His own dealings with each, of which no one else can know more than a very little here and there. Each man's sins are his own, and no one else's. He and he alone has been the doer, and he must bear the penalty.

This is the true meaning of these famous words which occur again at the beginning of my text: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." The murderers of Jesus said, 'The *father's* soul sinneth, and the *father's* soul shall die.' God's prophet declares that

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son : the righteousness of the righteous shall be up him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be up him." Here was a law of the plainest and simplest justice. God was just in the same way that the best of men are just : only His justice is perfect, and theirs always tainted with some weakness or unfairness. The murmurers pretended to be very zealous for justice : but this sermon of the prophet, while it shewed forth God's justice in infinitely greater power and glory, at the same time stripped them bare of their vain excuses in which they had thought to wrap themselves. God would not allow even His own commandments to be made organs of self-deceit and unbelief. The Jews complained that they had to suffer for their father's sins. 'No,' Ezekiel said, 'that is not the right way to look at the matter. Never mind what your father's sins may have been, leave them to God : it is with your own sins that you are concerned : it is for *them* that you are suffering. God is not unjust in punishing you, for you—*you yourselves*—have richly deserved it.' It might be that some of them did not bow down to stocks and stones as their fathers had done, and therefore thought themselves guiltless of idolatry. But God will not allow this plea. As we saw in the 14th chapter that He accused them of still setting up their idols in their heart, so here He goes on to reckon up other sins which might also estrange the heart from Him. And doubtless of these sins many of them were guilty, though they thought themselves

lished, and it was at the same time shewn that he has no right to make any single words of his an excuse for darkening His whole character, which is declared to us in the length and breadth of His revelation. But the second commandment remains: and we may naturally ask whether the doctrine of Ezekiel contradicts or sets it aside. Most surely not: both truths work into each other. God's curse upon idolatry falls upon the idolaters and their children as well as on himself. This is a matter of fact. Evil does go on breeding afresh from father to son. If a man commits a sin, it is not within his own power to say when it shall stop. He may have intended that it should not go beyond himself. But others catch the contagion: most of all, his own family. But, though this is this terrible mark to show how closely we are joined to each other for good or evil, the law is everlastingly true that each man has to answer for his own sin. The idolatry which the father bequeaths to his son comes naturally, as it were, from father to son. It may be harder for him to cast it out than it was for his father to keep it out; but still it is his duty. If he goes on sinning, it is by his own choice, and on his own head will be the consequences. As Ezekiel says, when he sees all his father's iniquities which he has done, he may consider, and *not* dislike; and then the curse is cut off, and the mission of inheritance broken: but God's law is not broken.

prophet's words to shatter our listlessness and unbelief. Too often we go blindly through life, with nothing more than a dim sense that there is something wrong about us at all, except that we cannot get everything we wish. And when we do partly awake to our misdoings, we are most willing to lay the guilt of them upon our fathers; we think how much of our character has come from them. We say that they did not teach us and bring us up as they might have done: perhaps that they *did* teach us actually to sin by their own example if not encouragement. All this may be true. They will answer to God for it. We cannot be and must not try to be their judges. If it is true, what a terrible warning it is to us not to act so that those who come after *us* may be able to say such things of *us*! for it is most true that we by our doings or our not-doings may make it harder for them to return to heaven and God. But yet we are not mere slaves to what our fathers have laid upon us. We may still turn from all our sins that they and we have committed, and then we shall surely live: we shall not die, for God Himself hath spoken it. Nay, it is He that is striving to win us back to our true inheritance as *His* children, *His* heirs, united to *Him* still more closely than to our parents, made partakers of *His* righteousness.. And if, in spite of these precious rights of ours, we feel ourselves too weak to break the deadly power which sinful custom and inherited evil have over us, H

XXI

THIRST FOR GOD ¹

“ LIKE as the hart desireth the waterbrooks, so longeth my soul unto thee, O God. My soul is athirst for God, yea even for the living God: when shall I come to appear before the presence of God? *Psalm* xlii. 1-2.

THE first thought that occurs to us, when we read these words and ask ourselves how we do it, is that, though all repeat the words, they properly belong only to a few. In one of the most obvious sense of the words, it may perhaps be said that some of us have a longing after God, and may also be said that others have not. Still, when we come to look a little more closely, we shall find that there is an equally important sense in which *all* have a right to use the language of the Psalm: quite strictly about our own selves; and then, when we understand that this is really so, the more shall we be led to that truest thirst for God. It often seems to us impossible that we should not have, and yet which the Psalm silently reproaches

What is it that we do—all of us—long for and thirst for? This is perhaps the oldest question in the history of the thoughts of men, since first they began consciously to think about themselves : strange enough it certainly seems that it has been necessary to ask so simple a question so many times over. Some kind of longing and thirsting it is certain that every man has. The opening words of the Psalm remind us of those thirsts and desires which the lower creatures have, and which are felt no less by men. But these are short partial desires, quickly coming and quickly satisfied. We men have all of us in some sense other desires than these, distinguishing us from the lower creatures, desires in which a larger realm of our being takes part, and in some sort never leaving us all our life long.

We none of us quite know what name to give to this longing. The commonest answer has been that happiness is the thing that we long for. But then what a slippery word is happiness itself! Every one has his own notion of happiness, and every one after a few years finds out how poor and false his own past notion of happiness has been, at least if happiness be that after which he cannot but be unceasingly yearning. Reduced to its simplest elements the commonest notion of happiness is not ultimately distinguishable from pleasure. There is something in all of us which does desire such happiness as this and in some it gets the better of all other desires.

How do we come to get such a notion of happiness? Partly because these things which make up happiness are in very deed good meant by God to be enjoyed in some measure by all men ; partly because they demand no toil they commend themselves to us without the need of any moral or mental culture. But the sad thing is that the time when they most seem to make up happiness is when we have them and when we do but give ourselves up to them altogether for good, we find that they cannot be happy that is, happiness is the end of our longings and they leave us still with all our longings unsatisfied nay, farther from being satisfied than they were at first. This is true not of good men particularly but of bad men particularly, but of all alike. We do not think it a hard fate which has been laid upon us. On the contrary, it is the sign of our human birth. Lower creatures find their appropriate satisfaction in lower things. But the deepest longings of men cannot be quenched in this manner, though they may go on all their life long seeking for that which has never yet given them content.

Thus much for what plainly belongs to this world and the present life. Shall we then find that which we are seeking if we say that the true object of our longings is the future life? A simple question it seems, yet not one that can be simply answered. Various are the meanings covered by the

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after God and all the things of God ; to another they are only the lengthening out of His commandments to present desires, not the raising them to a higher object. We cannot give sufficiency and helpfulness to things in themselves unsatisfying, merely shifting them to the other side of the grave. If we fancy that the deep longing that at times we feel within us can be satisfied by any mere enjoyment of our own hereafter, all that befalls us on earth will shew the vanity of the dream.

A nobler step has been made by those who believe that their desire is to do good to others, and thus are constantly looking to something beyond themselves. They who go onwards in this faith will doubtless find *some* genuine satisfaction often vouchsafed to them. In a Christian land with God's Word open before them they will at last be led into a yet better way, but they will suffer much weariness in the meanwhile. For the better we know that which is good, and the more thoroughly we are practised in performing it, the more painfully shall we feel our own want of power to do the good that we love, the more difficult and at last hopeless we shall find it to keep before us an image of good except in God Himself, and the person of His blessed Son—the Way, the Truth, and the Life. In the absence of that support no steady and powerful impulse for good within will long outlive a first enthusiasm, unless it be in a few elect souls ; while, in the absence of that light of divine darkness no solid assurance can be maintained in

effectual result. Theories of the progress of species will not sustain or even persuade us apart from the faith which enables us to fix our eyes on the "One far off Divine event, to which the whole creation moves."

But below all these partial longings, superadded to them, uniting them, exalting them, is that universal longing of which the Psalmist speaks. "My soul is athirst for God, yea even for the living God." The unknown end of all our thirsts and desires is nothing less than God Himself. Not His wisdom, or His mercy, or His favour, or anything else, but only comes from Him, but God Himself. It sounds a wild thing to say that He is the end of our desires really point to, since so many of us scarcely think of Him at all, and yet are as conscious of these unquenchable desires as any one else. But so it is : God made us to thirst for Him ; we desire Him ; this is the frame and fashion of our spirits, our truest selves. They have their pleasures and desires, yet stronger ones than those of the senses : and all their thirsts and desires alike point at last up to Him as their only fulfilment. These famous words of St. Augustine's 'Confessions' are not a mere outburst of enthusiastic devotion, but the statement of a fundamental and universal truth. "Thou hast made us toward Thyself, and our hearts hath no rest until it rest in Thee." In this there is no difference between any of us. A

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the heavenly fountain from which they came. Unhappily we do not understand our own selves : we feel the thirst within us, but we are long before we learn what alone will quench it.

The thirst of the spirit is chiefly of two kinds, the desire of light and the desire of love. No one surely is without the desire of light. We all are constantly meeting with things which provoke us to ask within ourselves, What is this ? how is this ? why is this ? If we are not curious about such things as books might tell us, we still are troubled with much greater questions. We cannot help seeing what is going on around us among our friends and neighbours, and then we ask how it is that this or that event happens to them. We are still more troubled by thoughts about ourselves and our present and future life. We wonder how a world so full of evil and sorrow can be the work of a good God. This is a longing for light. It is partly satisfied every time that a word spoken by any one else, or a verse of the Bible, or any other cause gives us a hint which throws light upon what was dark before. And the more we know, the more we desire to know, and then we soon find that there is no teaching like God's own ; and all His words and works seem to give forth ever fresh light so long as we remember that they indeed proceed from Him. At last we find that nothing less can satisfy us than God Himself to show us all truth, and we fall on our knees before Him and pray Him to scatter all our darkness and fill

spirit. There is to us a delight in the present affection of those who are dear to us, which we not exchange for any thing that men could give, whether it be child, or father, or mother, or husband, or wife, or brother, or sister that we love. They partly satisfy the thirst of our hearts, as God does that they should. But they are not always true to us; sometimes, it may be, fretful, sometimes and then, it may be, they die from among us, and our eyes can behold them no more. The more tenderly we love them, the more we shall feel that they cannot exhaust our love, that there is something within us which longs after One who cannot be exhausted. Unlike poor weak mortals, whose love is as deceitful as the sun, the love of God is as constant as the everlasting heavens, from whose presence death itself cannot cut us off. Our love is therefore never fulfilled till it lays hold upon Himself, and renews itself from that never-failing source.

The services of to-day, brethren, rebuke our unbelief, and encourage us to lift up our hearts above and through and above all the lower things which surround us and hide Him from us. The Feast of Michaelmas brings before our thoughts the weighty thoughts of angels, of spirits created like ourselves, yet employed in doing the will of God. We know little about them, and guessing on such subjects is vain and unprofitable, if not worse. Assuredly they were not intended to hold any large place in our religious faith, and by letting our thoughts dwell

men. But it is good to be reminded now and then that the world with which we are most familiar, the world of which our senses tell us, is but an atom in God's boundless creation, and that our forgetfulness of Him comes from our own blindness and hardness of heart. Our world remains the world which we have to live and do our work ; but we shall do our work better and more hopefully, if we suffer ourselves to have glimpses now and then of other worlds, in which His Light and His Love are better known and better enjoyed. So we may come to learn that *we* too shall find no rest except in Him.

By this time then, I trust, we have gained some notion of what the Psalmist meant by thirsting for God, by longing after Him as the hart desires the water-brooks. And observe it is for the *living* God that his soul thirsts. So long as our thoughts and wishes do not rise above our own pleasure or pride we are in fact striving to feed our life on dead things which perish at once and leave us unsatisfied. But God is to our hearts what a stream of quick running water is to the stag ; His love flows out upon us and into us ever fresh and new in an unfailing stream. Nay, the image of living, that is in Bible language running, water does after all but weakly set forth the true livingness of God. His life, so far as we can think of it at all, is or includes the life of a person, of a being like what we are in our best moods only infinitely better of one whose heart

made. And when we have in any measure
Him as He truly is, we cannot be content
thirsting for Him ; we shall go on to cry out,
shall I come to appear before the presence of
Every moment here on earth will seem the
precious and blessed which brings us close to the
sunshine of His light and love. Prayer and
thing like prayer will be altogether changed
what it was before we found out for whom we
thirsting. It will be no longer a wearisome
necessary petition to a powerful ruler who
may not grant it ; but a blessed asking and receiving
of tokens of love from a Father with whom
delight to converse. The services of the Church
will be valued as helping us to join with our
brethren in meeting Him where He has promised
be with us. And, when at last death overtakes
we shall, like our great Elder Brother, commend
spirits into our Father's hands, knowing that
taking us to be nearer to Himself for evermore.

XXII

THE CONSTANCY OF SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABEDNEGO

“SHADRACH, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.”—*Daniel* iii. 16-18.

THE first lessons for this morning and this afternoon both taken from the book of Daniel, are stories of two wonderful deliverances; the first of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, from the burning fiery furnace, the second of Daniel himself from the jaws of the lions. The chief lesson is nearly the same in both; in the one case there is a refusal to worship false gods, in the other a refusal to give up the worship of the One True God: and in both cases the prospect of a terrible death was cheerfully welcomed when the only way of escape visible to human eyes was closed.

Meshach, and Abednego rather more fully shall find that it touches ourselves very nearly.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were of Jews: but they were not living in their own land. Their land had been overrun by the desolating armies of the great and powerful king of Babylon. They had been carried away by him a great distance across the deserts to his own country, to his city of Babylon. You will remember the sadness and bitterness of the 137th Psalm, beginning, "By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept, we remembered thee, O Sion." That Psalm gives some idea of the feelings of the better sort of Jews when they were torn away from their own land and carried into foreign captivity, cut off from the sight of their own beloved temple, the house of God which marked His presence among them, and planted down in the midst of a crowd of idol images; to which they saw the men and women around them kneeling down and praying. In a foreign land their sufferings might not always be very great. The baser sort of them, those who cared for nothing but eating and drinking, might even get used to the new state of things, and be content to rest where they were. But not so the man who had any right and high feeling. The better man was, the more sure he was also to suffer grief at being banished from his own home and country, at finding himself amidst strange people.

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some among the Jews, and, as it turned out, some of the best among them, were willing to serve the conqueror faithfully, and to do honest and zealous work for him in his government. At that time there was no hope of their returning to their own land, and it was useless to go on nursing black thoughts against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had them in power. It was better far to accept cheerfully their present state, which had come to them by the will of God, and to try to lead useful and active lives. Such a man was Daniel himself; such also were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They were, as we are told, over the affairs of the province of Babylon, and were obviously treated with favour and confidence by the king. Thus far all was well. It is plain that for a time their duties did not constrain them to take part in the idol-worship around the temple, and that they were allowed to worship their own God in their own way.

But of a sudden all was changed. Nebuchadnezzar resolved to set up a golden image in the midst of the plain. He wished to celebrate the first setting up of the image with a splendid festival. No doubt he thought that his reign would be famous in a hundred years as the time when that figure of wrought gold was devoted to the service of his gods; and he wished all his people to join with him in the ceremony, that they might swell its grandeur, and be remembered for his glory what he considered as a pious and liberal act. So he sent for all those who

judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, and the s and all the rulers of the provinces, that they join with him in standing close around the and offering to it public and magnificent w Then he ordered that at a particular time ceremony all kinds of musical instruments sound forth; and that at that sign all the natives and foreigners alike, should fall down worship the image.

Now Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego could obey this command of the king without breaking commandment of God against worshipping images. And so they ventured to disobey it. Others were worshipping, they alone in that multitude stood erect and bowed not their heads. It was not to be expected that men holding such posts should escape notice in their disobedience. *did* they escape notice. Certain Chaldeans, told, being probably jealous at the advancement of men who were foreigners and even prisoners near and accused the brave Jews. Nebuchadnezzar was furious when he heard what they had done. It seemed to him the most amazing presumption of three helpless Jews, who owed all that was to them in their present life to his favour, should dare resist his will. Their offence was double—disobedience to his gods and rebellion against himself. He was willing to give them a chance of life. He did not easily believe that they would remain firm in their resolve when they clearly understood the

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others did. And so he warned them once more and ended his warning by asking scornfully, "Alas, who is that God that shall deliver you out of these hands?" It was a home question, which none but men of faith could answer. For in truth appearances were on the king's side. Whatever the power of the God of Israel might be, He had not chosen to interfere on their behalf in the troubles which had lately been coming upon them. He had suffered Jerusalem to fall a prey to the Babylonian armies: whatever misery fire and sword could bring He had allowed to be inflicted on His own people. He had seen His own house and holy place defiled, and made no sign, much less interfered to restrain the idolaters. He had looked on while thousands were carried away from the land which He had given them. Why then should He be expected to interfere now to save the lives of three poor wretched men, after He had suffered so many greater wrongs to be committed without hindrance?

Now mark the answer of these men, as we have it in my text. Observe how quietly and modestly they speak, without violence or bluster; and yet what a fearless and lofty tone breathes through every word. "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thy hands, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship them."

mighty king. They had no doubt what the duty was, and they meant to do it, come what may. They could not pretend to say whether God would step in to deliver them. Their conduct did not rest on any calculation about that. They knew power well, and said without reserve, that God *could* deliver them if He pleased; that He *could* destroy in a moment the king of Babylon and his host, as He had destroyed the king of Assyria and his host, and saved Jerusalem, in the days of Hezekiah; or again that He could command the flames to do no hurt. All this rested with Him. If it was right, He would do it. But, as I said, he could not tell whether He would do it or not, so they faced that dreadful chance, and told the king plainly that, whether God interfered or not, they would not should make them worship an idol or obey his command when idol-worship was what it was. Neither he nor his gods were anything to them. It was a question of disobeying the Lord their God.

This courageous answer only increased the anger of King Nebuchadnezzar. Like most men who possess unbounded power over others, he had come to the conclusion that every creature was made to obey his will. To find these three feeble prisoners pretending to have wills of their own, and disregarding his power, and his threats of using his power, kindled his passion to the highest degree. He ordered the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than it was usually heated, and Shadrach,

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carried out. They were cast into the furnace, heat of which was so great that the soldiers who had to cast them in lost their own lives in the act. But at this time He, by whose will it is that fire has all this power to destroy, in His good pleasure had decreed to save His faithful servants. The astonished Babylonians, looking into the flames, saw four men walking loose and unharmed, for with the three who had joined an angel of the Most High: and when King Nebuchadnezzar called upon his prisoners to come forth out of the furnace, they stood before him without a hair of their head singed or a single sin of the flames which had wrapped them round.

We need not follow the story farther. Its chief value for us lies in the resolution of the three men and not in their marvellous deliverance, still less in the deep impression which the deliverance made upon King Nebuchadnezzar's mind. That God should grant to men such divine courage to resist the will of a mighty king, and to face the prospect of a cruel death for the sake of right, is really, if we consider properly, quite as wonderful a thing as that fire should cause fire not to burn; and it is happily also one in which we have a much greater personal interest. It does us good to hear of those three men passing through the furnace unharmed, because it is an assurance to us that all those things which seem to us most mighty are but as chaff before Him who sits enthroned for ever, the Lord God Almighty.

servants of old time. So long as the story of the trial is read, so long all men who listen marvel that this is the thing which He loves ; that what a mass of mankind counts for mad folly is not so at all, unless it be folly to be on the Lord's side.

But we should go grievously astray if we look for the like interferences now. As a matter of fact, we know that they do not occur. Now, then indeed, when all is at the worst with us, there seems no room for hope any more, and no expected help or blessing seems to spring for us, we know not where ; and if we are Christians, we believe that the praise is due to the Giver of all things. But when the course of things is finally clear, then we know that it will not be altered, however devoted be our faith or sore our need, and burns, and water drowns, and night succeeds day, and we are not to look for help in any change of their nature. But, as we saw before, the three men needed no support like that, for they had no certainty whether God would deliver them, yet they had no *uncertainty* about what they were to do themselves.

I spoke just now of this faith of theirs as a wonderful thing. Is it not so, brethren ? We may ask ourselves honestly whether all our needs would not wonder very much indeed at us if we showed anything like it. Let us think of the trials in which we commonly go through the various acts of every day from the time when we rise

we have been doing *this* day, and specially all the things about which we have had, as we say, two minds. Perhaps we have been only going through the ordinary round of employments for our Sunday morning, and cannot single out any of our acts as clearly and decidedly wrong. But wherever there was a choice between laziness and activity, between indulging our own appetites and contriving that others should have enjoyment, between doing what we liked best ourselves and doing what others wished or what was *most* right and proper in itself; in all these cases should we quite like to have to confess in public the side which we took, even when we are ready to cry out that there was no great harm after all? You will say perhaps that these are paltry things, not fit to be in any way brought into comparison with grand trials of faith, such as we read in the Book of Daniel. I know they are paltry things; but what of that? The greater part of our life is made up of an immense number of the paltry things. In quiet times the grand events come seldom. But a life need not itself be paltry merely because, when we take it to pieces, each separate piece is paltry. A brick by itself is an insignificant thing indeed: yet when enough bricks are brought together, they make a house. One thing at least is certain, that it is by these petty choices of seeming indifferent everyday doings that our character is built up: and as is the temper in which we da-

trial came. It must have been exercised long in many a struggle which we no doubt should have called paltry, could we have seen it at the end. Growth, daily growth, yearly growth, growing steadily forward, this is the wonderful power by which such poor creatures as we have been changed beneath the influence of God's living Spirit into saints and heroes. If we take courage on the side of God when there are little sacrifices to be made or refused, the great sacrifices, when they come, will take care of themselves, and we shall be astonished to find how little effort they require.

One thing more let us notice in the temptation. The temptation which came to them to sacrifice their lives by denying their God came through the influence of men. Like the Apostles, they decided that they ought to obey God rather than men. This lesson has not lost its value, because it seldom happens that the will of one powerful man constrains us to sin. *Our* danger comes much oftener from the power and the will of the many: that is, where we are, and wherever we are, we are always tempted to swerve to the right hand or to the left by the pressure of some who are our fellow-men. Our own wish not to lose their good opinion is in many cases, when we should do right if we were alone, we easily give way to wrong because we persuade ourselves that it is useless for us to stand out against a general feeling, and that it can

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you have heard to-day, if you would know what God thinks of these excuses. Consider how easily the men might have made excuses for themselves, while all around them were obeying the heathen king's command, and when it seemed that nobody could be the worse for *their* doing like the rest. That is the most dangerous thought of all : for indeed no man can measure the widespreading harm done to other men's souls by a single known act of sinful cowardice, or the equally widespreading good done by a single act of steadfast resistance to evil. And, above all, do not think that you can ever really be alone. When those three men seemed alone in the midst of that vast multitude, one like unto the Son of God was with them in the fire. And more than this is yours. The Son of God Himself is with you, if you have but eyes to see Him. If you are able to make any resistance, it is His strength that is sustaining you. While we falter and shrink, we cannot but fancy ourselves to be alone : but the moment we cleave to the right we find that we are indeed in the midst of the city of the living God, with all His hosts around us.

XXIII

THE LORD'S CONTROVERSY

"HE hath shewed thee, O man, what is good ; and what the Lord require of thee but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?"—*Micah* vi. 8.

ON Sunday next we enter once more on the path of memories and hopes on which our Christians repose. To-day let us try to gather some of the elementary thoughts concerning the nature of man which have formed a large part of the teachings of our services since Trinity Sunday. These which have of late come forth in clearer tones and lessons from the Minor Prophets.

Read by itself, the text has a somewhat harsh sound. To understand it rightly, we must place before us the dramatic setting which introduces the Lord, the king and judge of His people, coming from His lofty throne, His awful seat of judgment, to speak to rebellious Israel in another tone and with another character. He has rebuked in vain,

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small part of their sin is but senseless folly and verseness. So He comes down not to command to argue. "Come now and let us reason together saith the Lord," are the well-known words of lesson for Advent Sunday; and this is the meaning of Micah as well as of Isaiah. God is resolved to plead His own cause against Israel as though they were an equal; and He invites them to meet Him in the presence of the everlasting hills. For many an age those hills have looked down in silent, unchanging majesty on all the doings and all the sufferings of the people. Through summer and winter, day and night, sunshine and storm they have remained the same, while one generation after another has been born and has grown up and has died. In their solemn, stately presence God desires to hear the matter argued out as between Him and His people. "Hear ye now what the Lord saith: Arise and contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice. Hear ye, O mountains, the Lord's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth; for the Lord hath a controversy with His people, and He will plead with Israel."

Then come the words in which God begins the great controversy. "O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me." He calls, that is, on the people if they have any complaint against Him their Lord, to bring it forward without fear. He desires that the hills should hear whatever the people think

they hated Him, He is anxious to know what they suppose they have for so doing. Perhaps they have thought Him guilty of some misdeeds on their part which justify their disobedience. If they will but not fear to speak out what they have done amiss in Him, to declare by what acts of His they have wearied them. Such plain speech He will not regard as blasphemy or insolence; it is His own wish that they should make known whatever is the secret in their hearts which sets them against Him.

Meanwhile He just slightly mentions some of His great deeds of mercy and deliverance which He has wrought for them. "I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt and redeemed thee out of the hands of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam." Can a people, who have been thus favoured, have met with such marvellous favour from the Lord have indeed any complaint to bring against Him? Then He reminds them of one passage in their history, when Balak the king of Moab strove to persuade the prophet Balaam to curse them on their way, to put an end to their conquering advance; and Balaam answered him by declaring the power and goodness of all curses against a people who had the Lord for their God. Vain it was at that time to curse against Israel; vain, because the Lord his God was with him, and the shout of a King was among them. So from the unwilling lips of one who had

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deny the righteous acts of the Lord, but heather had been compelled to confess them.

Thus speaks the Lord before the mountains waits for an answer. It comes in another form what was asked. The people are silent about wrong dealings of the Lord towards them. Instead of honestly pleading their cause, they rather enter in terror how they may satisfy the demands of the Lord. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" Obviously here there is no attempt of the people to do what they had been invited to do. They will not stand out openly beside the Lord and state their complaints against Him. They neither deny what He has done for them nor yet confess it. They have nothing to plead against Him, yet they will not say so. They take for granted that He is a hard, grasping, exacting master. They think this argument of theirs with them is only meant to wring something out of them. So they demand to know how much He will take to let them off. They probably were not acquainted with powerful and lawless men who oppressed and robbed their neighbours, but who violence might be bought off, if only a sufficient price or ransom were given. And even such they sup-

gifts and sacrifices. Their words shew an blindness to the meaning of God's past blessing. They forgot that those blessings were the sure proof of a King who loved them and did all things for their benefit. Thus they seize the opportunity to learn from His own lips once for all how He will satisfy Him, how much they must part with to buy off the injury which they suppose Him wishing to bring upon them. So they ask whether the worship which He craves is one which is fulfilled in the sacrifices of their cattle? They doubt perhaps whether so great a God will be content with less than the slaughter of whole flocks at His altars. Will He be pleased, they ask, with thousands of rams or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? A terrible thought remains behind. What if this mighty God demands a more costly sacrifice than the produce of all their fields? What if the blood of beasts and the oil of olive berries is not enough to satisfy His greed? What if He demands for human blood, the blood of those most dear to them, their firstborn sons who are to carry on His name? The nations around believed such things of *their* gods. They sent their sons and their daughters through the fire to appease the anger of their idol-god Moloch. And might not their own God, the God of Israel, have like appetites and cruel demands and refuse to be baulked of His vengeance for anything less than the precious blood of their first-

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how poor and false is the notion they have of Him. From their lips it only means that they have somehow contrived to offend one stronger than themselves, and so are afraid they may have to suffer for it. They do not see that they have been ungrateful to one who was blessing them, and hard-hearted to one who was loving them and striving to melt them into love. Otherwise they could not dream of putting such questions to Him. All their offers to bribe Him into mercy by yielding up to Him their best possessions only shewed how they misunderstood His whole nature, and thought He was even such an one as themselves.

Then comes the text. It is the answer given to these wild and desperate questions not directly by the Lord Himself, but by His holy prophet. The prophet has to speak for God to the people ; but he is also himself one of the people, and so his message is that of a man who has gone through the same discipline as themselves. But the difference in his heart from their hearts has made all the course of his life have a different look to him from what it had to them ; and he speaks out of that which he knows because he has felt it in himself. Not in language of rebuke or threatening, but in simple appeal to what they too might have known if they would, he fulfil his office as God's spokesman among men.

"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good ; what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with

faithless questionings. 'Why ask those que Micah seems to say, 'as if what you want some curious and difficult knowledge about whims and caprices of a dark and fitful te What you really require to know God has s you already. One broad, common word cont all, 'good': in shewing you what is good H shewn you the one thing that He delights in self, the one thing that He asks for from you. yourselves, is this or that thing good, good best and most proper sense, in the sense of you know that you need not be ashamed? the thing *be* good, then be sure that that will God and bring you near to Him, for He is go itself. You will not surely pretend that you make out what is good. Are you not a ma being a man how is it possible for you to be q the dark about good and evil? Perplexed yo sometimes be, but the truth is plain enough purposes of life. God has not merely told y His spoken or written Law; He has shewn Everthing that has happened to you has bee of His teaching. Every step that you have in wisdom since you were a silly child has lesson from God about good. You may blunders about it now and then; you cannot knowing enough about it to set you right with

This is the first part of the text. But the p does not leave the subject till he has explain clear examples how complete and practical an

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let them alone ; but they craved to know what particular sacrifice would be to His mind. 'I have told you,' the prophet seems to say, 'that the good which God has been shewing you all your life is the only thing you can please Him with. There is no secret, no curious knowledge in the matter. It is still you may think perhaps that good is too vast and various a thing for you to take hold of, and you want to be told of some single thing to do. Well, then, here are samples of what is good, of what God requires of you, and they are to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. You are always living among men. Every day, almost every hour, you have to choose how you will treat some of them. You can hardly stir a hand or yourself without its producing some effect on others. Take care that you are just. Take no advantage of any one, do everything fairly and truthfully, and as far as in you lies, help others to do the same. This is one side of what you owe to others. But you have a right to something more than not be wronged. They claim your mercy. There must always be sorrow, pain, suffering among them men with their wrong doings. Do not exact your full rights from them any more than you would wish to have the strictest justice executed on you. Tender pity have a place in your thoughts about them, and so mercy will temper all your dealings with them. Do not think that such justice and mercy are wasted as towards God. They will

good which He loves. His dealings with men are for *their* benefit, not His. If you too labour for the benefit of men, you will be fulfilling His desire. Do not forget Himself. Walk with Him, and walk with Him humbly. Think of Him as ever with you. Do not wish it otherwise; welcome His presence. But welcome it as the presence of one far above yourself, above you most of all in goodness. Walk humbly with Him, as owing all to His bounty.

These few things, to do justly and love mercy, to walk humbly with our God seem very simple. So in truth they are. Opportunities for their practice are before our feet at every moment: our life is made up of them. But if we try to practise them, we find them ever growing and growing in front of us. Every sin and every evil passion, nay, any and every mere indulgence, left unsubdued in our own selves, takes much taken from our power to serve God or our fellow-men. If we could carry out those few things perfectly, we should find that they would have led us through the whole world of good. All that we believe Christians is needed to enable us to carry them out. We cannot stop short anywhere and think we have done enough, without finding that we have left justice and mercy undone, and, yet more, that we have parted company with our God or exchanged our trustful humbleness before Him for insane pride and presumption. It is impossible to believe that the prophet Micah meant to discourage the sacrifice which the people had been taught to offer at the

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pleasure in the blood of bulls and goats, much less the pain and death of a child and the anguish of a father's heart. But when they had fully learned that God's demands are demands for good, and good alone, then they would find sacrifices of one sort or other needful helps in schooling their rebellious nature to follow justice and mercy and to wait humbly before Him. The Cross of Christ is a perpetual token of the one way to the highest good. The simplest act of good demands some giving up of self. There are times when we must part with all that is dearest, not because God delights in our loss, but because that which we cherished stands in the way of our doing His good, the good which embraces ourselves and the whole world.

In these times, brethren, it is not easy to understand by our own feelings the whole of the terrible questions which we have heard Israel uttering to the Lord, the questions of a people who have no love, no faith, no holy fear towards God, but who do fear Him very much indeed with a blind and unholy fear. Yet we know only too well what it is to be ready to go through any formal acts of service rather than to put a check upon the evil impulses which make it impossible for us to be just or merciful or to wait humbly with God. And the root of this misguided and worthless service is a false persuasion about Him, an unwillingness to believe that His desires and His requirements are wholly untainted with the paltriness which clings to ours. We forget that

XXIV

THE FEAST OF ALL SAINTS

“AFTER this I beheld and lo a great multitude which no number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and holding in their hands palms in their hands : and cried with a loud voice, saying, Save us, our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. Rev. vii. 9, 10.

THURSDAY last is one of the very few days in the year on which passages from the Book of Revelation are appointed to be read. Considering the great difficulty of understanding many parts of this book, and the mistaken ways of looking on many of its prophecies here and hereafter into which it is easy to fall, and constantly brooding over its visions, we may be surprised that it does not come forward too prominently in our Church services. Yet it has precious lessons in its own, and the Bible would be sadly impoverished without it. The earlier books of the New Testament shew us first Christ's own words and works upon earth, and then the words and works of the

while it keeps before our eyes that same earth on which the Apostles lived and died and from which they too at last departed, the earth on which we too are living, teaches us at the same moment to look on the heaven into which Christ ascended and the Lord Almighty at whose right hand He sat down, and to remember that that same heaven is about us likewise. We have already heard how the Lord Jesus Christ for us men and for our salvation came *down* from heaven. Here we learn the equally needed lesson how He, being lifted *up*, is drawing all men unto Himself.

The name which was spoken by God to Isaiah and which St. Matthew in his first chapter applies to the infant Jesus, Emmanuel, "God with us," is echoed through every page of the New Testament. But its strength and use are soon lost for us if we rise to no higher thoughts of God and of ourselves than those which belong to Christ's earthly life. When the Son of God humbled Himself to man's estate and dwelt among us here on earth, all that was done that He might raise us up with Himself to His Father's heavenly home, and that we might dwell with God as God had dwelt with us. And this is the lesson which the Book of Revelation may teach us in many ways. If it lifts our eyes from the world in which we are daily walking, it is that we may commune with that unseen world in which we often find it so hard to believe, and with that future world

our daily life, and make us dreamers when to be workers, it might be wise to hide them from us altogether. But if, as we are bound to believe, they may give at once thoughtfulness and strength to every action, it cannot be right to treat them as if they were not written for our learning. We are oppressed by the darkness and confusion which often seem to beset us from day to day, and year to year as we journey on through life, and we need help and not a hindrance to be shewn to us in fulfilling His purposes of light and order in the world even here, in and among ourselves ; and this help will come at last when His light and order shall no longer be seen in visions, but as clearly and as takeably as the common sunlight.

Again, we often feel as if we stood alone in a wide world ; as if our cares and sufferings were like any one else's cares and sufferings ; as if even our own dead senseless clothing had more to do with us than the people of our own race, or of our own nation. Here once more the Revelation comes to our aid. Its visions are for men of the whole earth in all ages, and the more we enter into its spirit, the more we see how clearly it speaks to us of one constant fellowship in all the doings and sufferings of men.

This last lesson is read to us with peculiar appropriateness on All Saints' Day. We find in the pro-

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whom we read in the New Testament, and whose names should be loved by every one to whom Christ Himself is dear. There is however a danger lest, calling them saints, and honouring them in a way in which we honour none other, we shut them from kindred with ourselves: and thus, instead of bearing witness to the bonds which unite us all to Christ, they might even help to put Him far away from the greater number of us. We have therefore another day, which we call All Saints' Day, on which we publicly give honour to all good men in all ages known or unknown, who have proved themselves worthy of the name of saints, not only by performing great acts of devotion or by making their names famous in rightful ways, but by doing quietly and humbly all their life long whatever work God gave them to do, whether it were glorious or mean in the eyes of men.

Let us now turn to the passage appointed instead of an epistle for All Saints' Day, from which I have taken my text. St. John saw a vision of four angels preparing to execute God's anger upon the earth and its produce; and another angel bidding them pause till he should have sealed or marked the servants of God upon their foreheads. He heard the number of those that were thus sealed or marked, 12,000 from each of the tribes of Israel. Then he beheld a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues. This multitude is either the

they had enjoyed no safety from outward evil. In the 14th verse one of the elders tells St. John, "These are they which came out of great tribulation." The sore judgements of God which fell upon the earth did not spare them. *The blessing* God promises His Saints is not that no misfortune shall ever befall them, though He does often wonderfully protect them; but that He will always be by their side in misfortune and in happiness, ever bringing good out of evil, removing away their dross, and making them more and more like Himself. This is God's picture of His Saints. Sometimes all their life long they have nothing but prosperity. This is perhaps the severest trial. They who have never had to mourn for the loss of those who are dear to them, or been themselves brought into pain or want or any other trouble, yet have been able to keep their hearts fixed upon God all the while, have indeed a right to the name of Saints. But whether we consider such a life as a blessing or as a trial, or rather, as it really is, both, it is not one that can possibly fall to the lot of many in any station.

"These are they which came out of great tribulation," said the elder. The end of the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews reminds us of what God's holy ones had had to undergo in old time. After describing the various difficulties of faith which had been made from Abel to R

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Himself when the malice of the devil seemed have most completely prevailed against them. Then at once come the words, "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith: who instead of the joy that was before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Here is the Divine comment on a tale, or rather a long chapter of tales, of great tribulation. The trials which the Hebrew Christians had to endure were, as yet at least, not to be compared with the trials which their forefathers had borne in entire faithfulness. These were the days when the support of remembering Christ's life of death and suffering was unknown to men. *They* had been stoned, sawn asunder, slain with the sword. The Hebrew Christians had not as yet resisted unto blood, in striving against sin. Yet the example of their forefathers was one which it was right to keep before them. The faith which enabled men to subdue kingdoms and stop the mouths of lions is the same faith which enables men to endure more common and less frightful trials.

They were tempted to be wearied and faint in their minds. Can any words express better

unwilling work and the most senseless enjoyment. To them, as to every one, God has a message of love ; but they are not likely to care very much about His saints. And indeed there cannot be many in this congregation who have reached middle life without being somewhat weary by what they have passed through. But it is all sobering that is good. The listless, sullen mood which we sometimes drag through the week, without heart or hope, expecting the next week to be empty and dry, and so on to the end of our lives, is sober enough, God knows, but that is not what He asks from us. He would have us meet every trial that befalls us in a cheerful and hopeful way, remembering, as the Epistle goes on to say, that "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth and scourgeth even as His sons whom He receiveth." Even thus the multitude whom St. John saw, were standing in white robes, holding palm branches, the signs of victory, in their hands, and their song was one of praise and joy. If we are told that they *had come* out of great tribulation. Their trials and sufferings were over, and they had reached their heavenly home. But the same spirit and temper towards God and man must have been the same throughout their conflict with the powers of evil that it was now that the conflict was over. They must have glorified God in the midst of their fiery trials of temptation and suffering : nay, they must have been those fiery trials that taught them why the

vision comes in *before* the plagues fall upon earth through which much of their tribulation must come about. Thus all through the trials of life from its very beginning St. John bids us listen to the song of the redeemed in heaven, not merely that we may not yield ourselves up to the powers of evil, which are ever striving to make this earth our all in all, but that we may know the inner burden of the song that we ought to be singing now.

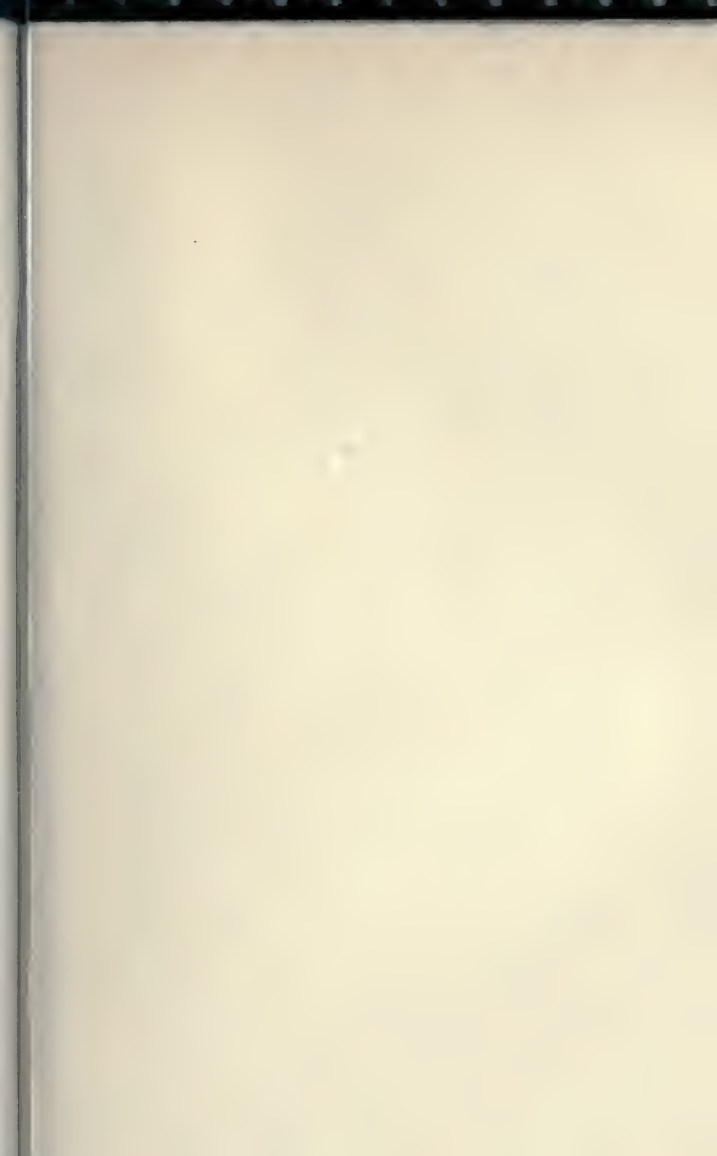
And if we were left only to behold the picture of God's saints by themselves, we should soon find little profit in their example. We cannot in the long run rely for help on that which is not above ourselves; and these were men just like ourselves. Saints though we call them, they dreamed of no glory of saintship for themselves. Their glory was to deny themselves and take up the cross of Him who had laid down His life for them, and seek from Him alone fresh supplies of life for the present and hope of life to come. The Hebrews are bidden to run with patience the race set before them, looking unto *Jesus*, the beginner and the finisher of their faith. He had gone through every plague of darkness and misery before them, to shew them the way, and give them strength to follow Him. The work of His sacrifice was complete: God beheld all mankind in Him, and was well pleased. What they had to do was not to suffer themselves to fall away from Him who through the Cross had made a way for them

mixed with His, and by suffering they made partakers of His sufferings. There sang a song of salvation to the God who sits on the throne, to Him who fixed in His everlasting throne had been ruling all things in heaven and earth by the word of His power, even when the curse of sin and death seemed most successful. It was the Lamb, who had come from heaven to redeem men, that they might stand with Him before the Father's throne. In that double vision of God in heaven and God made man lies all our strength.

But before that throne we cannot stand alone. Next to the presence of God and the Lamb, the highest blessing is the presence of them who have followed the Lamb whithersoever He goes. At the feast of All Saints we are reminded that we have not merely lived the life of God on earth, but that they are living it now. We do not think of them as dead, when we think of them seated at the throne. All whose names we have ever heard of who have made us tremble with joy at the thought of their faith and loving devotion, are there with the band of Christ and His holy Apostles: all those who have known in childhood or manhood as friends a heavenly and blessed spirit which awoke in us some faint longings after good, and have now departed away from the earth, all are part of that royal company. When we meet at God's table, as we are invited,

upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. When we think of them, we may learn in some measure how to make not our lips only but our lives repeat the song of praise, and ascribe "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever."







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